MERCHANT OF BOMBAY

K. G. Mallya

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।
Let noble thoughts come to us from every side
— Rigveda, 1-89-i

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(NOVEL)

by

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BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

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Dedicated to the Memory of

My Father

Shri Devaraya Mallya

My Elder Brother, Shri Subbaraya Mallya

and

My Friend & Well-Wisher Shri A. M. Kamath (Macson)

Who served Bombay in their own

Humble ways

- The Author

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

Originally Bombay, the present day commercial capital of India was a group of seven insignificant islands. Although culturally it was a part of the Western India, politically it was neither under the Moghuls nor the Marathas and interestingly not realising its strategic position, the native rulers completely ignored these "seven emeralds" set in the silvery seas.

Historically, after the Portuguese acquired Bombay from the Sultans of Gujarat, it went to the British way back in 1661 as a dowry from the King of Portugal to the Prince of England and thereafter the Crown of England rented it out at an annual rent of Pounds 10 to the East India Company, a trading Company of England but having its Indian Headquarters at Surat, a flourishing city in those days. With this, there was a turning point in the history of Bombay. The British invited people to Bombay from the other parts of India so that the useless islands could blossom into a bustling township. Besides promising the freedom of trade and religion they gave many concessions to the immigrants. Still, people hesitated to come and settle down. Yet Bombay was destined to grow and attract people from all walks of life.

Initially Bombay had many ups and downs. People had to live in constant fear and danger of being attacked from any side by any body. There were invasions and lootings and every time, people of Bombay had to organise themselves to withstand the onslaughts. This was possible because Bombay had brave and noble sons who could rise to any occasion and act as her leaders.

One such leader was the legendary Rama Kamati who lived in Bombay from about 1650 to 1725 A.D. He was a merchant, farmer, philonthrophist and above all a gallant warrior ready to fight and die anytime for and on behalf of Bombay. He reconstructed the Walkeshwar Temple and built quite a few shrines in Bombay. Like this his was a many-faceted personality without a parallel but people jealous of his name, fame and achievements ultimately were successful in bringing about his ruination by making use of the government machinery by foul means. Rama Kamati, in the evening

of his life was condemned to life imprisonment on filmsy grounds without any base and all his wealth of lakhs of rupees in those days, was confiscated. He died in the prison around 1725 A.D. unwept and unsung and tragically and ironically 23 years later he was declared innocent and acquitted of all the charges heaped on him.

Against this background this novel is written and Rama Kamati is the hero of the story over here. The name "Merchant of Bombay" is borrowed from the names of one of his ships, "The Bombay Merchant" and not from the famous "Merchant of Venice" by William Shakespeare.

While writing the history of Bombay, writer after writer both the English and Indian condemned the trial of Rama Kamati. Simultaneously they also praised unequivocally the selfless service, rendered by him to the people and City of Bombay. Thus Rama Kamati has earned a pride of place in the history of Bombay, and he deserves it. The story here, built up on the foundation of various government records, books and journals amply proves that this hero of Bombay should be remembered for ever.

Well, it was from my spiritual master H. H. Shrimat Sudhindra Thirtha Swamiji of Sri Kashi Math Samsthan that I first heard about Rama Kamati and his services for the growth and progress of Bombay in its formative years. Shri Swamiji had also stated that he learnt about Rama Kamati from his preceptor and his preceptor definitely from his, as Rama Kamati had donated land for building shrines in Banaganga area of Malabar Hill.

The Bhavan's Journal, an English fortnightly, published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay had serialised this novel with effect from 15th August 1992 as a mark of honour to Rama Kamati. The Annual Number carrying the first episode of the novel was released by Shri P.V.Narasimha Rao, the former Prime Minister of India and the novel was applauded by quite a few readers as one of the finest historical novels written in recent times.

Ahmedabad **K.G. Mallya**

15-8-1997

1. AT THE FEET OF FAMILY DEITIES

The day had just dawned.

After taking bath and offering the morning prayers to the deities in the god's niche Durga Kamati got ready to go to the temple wearing his usual dhoti with stitches here and there and covering his shoulders and chest with a shawl completely faded and wrinkled. When he was about to wear his footwear there came his wife holding a copper plate in which were tulsi leaves and flowers to be offered to the deities in the temple.

As she handed over, she mildly remarked, "This time when you get the monthly pension you must buy a pair of new footwear before you purchase anything else. I am tired of seeing everyday these completely worn out sandals of yours. God alone knows how do you manage to wear."

At her face Durga stared silently for a while. Then he looked at the sari and the blouse she had put on - faded, torn and stitched again and again. Although he saw her everyday in the rags, today it looked more pathetic and painful suggesting that the family caught in the whirlpool of poverty could never come out of it. However not willing to give expression to his thoughts he asked, "Chiman, has he woken up or is still in the bed?"

The wife could sense his feelings. "I was talking about buying new footwears but you ask for Chiman." She pretended to be angry.

"Yes, I know." Durga explained looking deep into her eyes. "While you can't bear the sight of my old sandals I too can't stand the plight of your wearing the rags. It is ages since I bought you a new sari . Without footwear one can walk barefooted but without dress - can one live? This treacherous poverty brought on us seems to be endless. I don't know how long should we suffer like this." He moaned.

Hearing his words of helplessness his wife bowed her head. Her throat choked, tongue withdrew and voice broke; yet she controlled her feelings, emotions and the tears. Then she slowly raised her head and in a very low whisper, consoled: "Moments in the early hours of morning

are supposed to be the most auspicious ones. Therefore it is better we do not discuss our misfortune now when there is none on this earth to help or to hear the tales of our woes. Therefore please go, offer these flowers and petals to the deities and pray for the end of our agony. God alone can save us from this misery."

"What you say is right." He agreed. "The priest in the temple must be waiting for me. Let me hurry." He took the plate, wore the same old footwear and left hurriedly. Then he started walking briskly down the Bazar Gate Street, the centre of the city's commercial activities. As there was still an hour or two to go for the shops to open and the day's business to start, the street was wearing a deserted look though the milk-men were going on their usual rounds from door to door to give the morning quota of milk.

For Durga it was an everyday sight. Therefore without looking anywhere he was walking down carrying the plate devoutly. When he had covered almost half the distance, suddenly the morning breeze brought to his ears the chimes of the temple bells ringing very clearly. "The morning puja, has it already begun?" He was surprised and then with an urge not to miss the puja he thought of running to the temple but strangely a feeling unusual to his nature came: "Why should I run? Over decades every morning, whether it is autumn or spring, winter or summer, I am regularly attending to the puja and offering prayers but ultimately what is the outcome? No enough food to eat, no decent dress to wear and above all, living in an everlasting disgrace of being called the offspring of a traitor though in reality father was not."

Although his restless mind was thinking like this, his limbs behaving differently took longer steps briskly and within the next few minutes he was at the doorway of that small temple situated at the end of the Bazar Gate Street.

The temple was open to all without any bar on caste, creed, community or faith. It was constructed by Durga's father, Rama Kamati and was dedicated to two deities, Lord Venkataramana and Lord Krishna popularly known as Shyamaliyalal in Gujarati. Lord Venkataramana was the deity of daily worship by Rama Kamati and his ancestors even before the family migrated in search of new pastures from Goa to Bombay

under the Portuguese regime. During his life-time Rama Kamati had donated enough land and wealth to this temple so that the religious rites and rituals would take place from time to time without any interruption....

Therefore, though the priest had rung the bells, which was normally done during the puja, actually the puja was not started and the priest was waiting for Durga's arrival as a mark of respect to the family that was responsible for the existence of the temple.

Well, as soon as he reached, Durga devoutly handed over the offering he had brought. The priest swiftly adorned the idols with all that he had brought - the tulsi leaves, flowers and petals. Durga with folded hands stood watching the deities being decorated with flowers his wife had collected at the dawn. It was an early hour and so as usual there were no devotees in the temple. As soon as the decoration by the priest was over, Durga confessed, "Sorry, I am late."

"Never mind." the priest, an elderly person smiled: "I was just wondering why you did not turn up at your usual time. Over years, you have not missed the puja in the morning even on a single occasion. If I remember right, when you had fever five years ago caring little for health you had come to the temple with your usual offering of tulsi and flowers. I appreciate your devotion to God. Sooner or later certainly you will earn His grace."

Hearing the words of appreciation and consolation, Durga looked fixedly at the deities. The candelabras in front of the deities were burning gently and in their glow, the deities were looking lively and majestic inspiring devotion and reverence. Without his knowledge he mechanically joined his palms, closed his eyes and his heart whispered a silent prayer: "O Lord of lords, why can't you open your eyes for a moment and throw at least a fleeting glance at me - a hapless devotee who is unable to buy even one single sari for his wife who is also your devotee? Why our prayers are not answered and why this punishment? What unpardonable sin did we or our family commit? Should we die in poverty that too branded as the members of a traitor's family? O Lord of lords, we have suffered enough and that will do. Shower mercy on us please!".....

Like this for the first time when Durga was standing motionless like a statue, the priest, astounded, knew not what to do. "Evidently something must have gone wrong!" Thought he and went close to him, perplexed. Touching his shoulder softly he asked, "Durga, can I offer the 'arti' to the deities?"

As if awakened from a deep slumber Durga opened his eyes and stared at the priest his thoughts still lingering on in the restless mind.

The priest again enquired, "Shall I offer the 'arti'?"

Durga wore a forced smile and said, "Please, please go ahead. I was pondering over something serious."

"Don't you worry." The priest in all sincerity consoled. "When you have here, your family deity, Lord Venkataramana to protect what are you afraid of? There should not be any anxiety!" Reassuring like this he took the 'arti', lighted the wicks and chanting hymns in praise of the deities, waved. As usual Durga looking at the deities without batting eyelids rang two of the bells with both of his hands.

The arti was over. And as a part of the everyday puja the priest prayed first for the welfare of Durga's family and then for the welfare of the city of Bombay. Durga's eyes were simmering with tears. The priest noticing the tears in his eyes for the first time, thought that he should now enquire about the cause of his agony. Therefore, he went closer to Durga and asked very softly, "Durga, you do not seem to be cheerful today. Your face indicates it. Are you all right?"

"Why? I am as cheerful as ever!" Durga said wiping his tears and trying to smile!

Not willing to accept, the priest said, "For the first time today you are late. Then after reaching you seem to be restless. I can read from your face that even now, your mind is engrossed in some deep thoughts. Tell me what has brought you to this state of despair. May I know the reasons?"

Durga gave no answer. Instead he stared at the priest. The same old familiar person devoted to the deities and dedicated to the Kamat family, whom he was meeting in the temple day after day ever since his childhood days. Since years he was hearing him chant the same prayers

seeking from God the welfare of the family as well as the city. During the everyday puja he had chanted the same hymns, made the same gestures, and offered the same prayers, when his father had reached the pinnacle of the power and position. Then the same prayers continued when his father was tried for alleged treason and was sentenced to life imprisonment. Now the same prayers were being offered when the family was in the throes of poverty and humiliation.

There was no dearth of sincerity and devotion at least on the part of the priest but why the prayers were not fully answered? Why were they sinking while the city was prospering?.....

Like this when Durga was thinking silently, the priest grew more and more anxious.

"Definitely something very serious must have taken place!" thought he. "Poor thing! Must be feeling shy to reveal. Whatever be the reason let me at least try to console. He then cordially invited, "Durga dear, if you are not in a hurry to go back, please, be seated for a while. In that pot there is some milk kept as an offering to the deities. I shall go next door and fetch two lotas. Let us take a little milk as 'prasadam'. Hope you will not mind!"

"No! Not at all!" Breaking his silence Durga nodded his head in assent and sat down squatting in front of the deities looking at them reverentially without blinking his eyes. Somehow to him today they were looking more and more mystical then ever.

Within a minute the priest returned with two lotas. Pouring the milk in both the lotas, he offered one to Durga and kept the other for himself.

"Please!" The priest politely requested: "Don't hesitate. After all God's prasadam."

Silently Durga drank and the milk had a soothing effect. He looked a bit cheerful. Noticing this, the priest not finding anything to speak about cleverly inquired, "How was the milk?"

"Sweet like 'amrita'. Must he cow's milk." Durga replied. Nodding his head the priest took his share of milk, wiped his mouth with the end of his shawl and then said: "Yes! You are right. It is cow's milk.

We offer only the cow's milk to the deities everyday. But these days it is difficult to get cow's milk in Bombay....."

"Bombay is fast growing" Durga remarked. "Now nothing is easily available here."

The priest smiled. He felt that the moment was ripe to ask the reason for his being morose and serious a little while ago. So he asked politely, "Durga dear, can you tell me why you were so dejected?" He looked straight into his eyes. Being unable to bear the stare of the elderly priest who was so sincere, Durga bowed his head for a while, thought of some thing and then slowly started narrating: "You are like my elder brother".....

"Yes!"Acknowledged the priest.

"I have no well-wishers and friends." Durga's voice trembled.

"Go ahead!" encouraged the priest: "See, both of us are sitting in front of the deities of daily worship. Let us have faith in them. Please tell me what the matter is!".....

"My father though wealthy led a very religious and simple life. He constructed several temples in Bombay including the one in Walukeshwar. He was an ardent devotee of Lord Venkataramana and Lord Shyamaliyalal over here. He had rendered help and assistance to hundreds of people in the city. Anybody who had approached him for help did not return emptyhanded".....

"Yes, I know!" The priest gratefully remembered. "I too am one among those hundreds. I, as a jobless young man, came from Thane seeking his favour. He made me the priest here, gave me a place to live in and earn a living."

"Such a noble soul," Durga asked, "how could he, at his old age, be termed as a traitor and imprisoned for life losing everything?"

The priest was rendered speechless for a while. He bowed his head and thought. Thereafter he said with a sigh: "Durga, for every one of us there is a thing called fate or destiny. Its ways are always unknown. What more can I say?"

Not convinced at the mention of fate Durga wanted to know, "Then, do you think fate is greater than the Providence?"

The priest thought of avoiding the difficult philosophical path. Instead,he diplomatically said, "I learn the witnesses and the evidences used against your father were all fake and forgery. They say it was a big conspiracy hatched to bring down your father and destroy the family so that you people will never raise your head again in Bombay!"

"How could we raise our head when we have to live not only in poverty but also in humiliation and shame when my father was jailed for life for the so called high crimes of treason?" Durga sadly moaned: "Now let me forget my father for a while. Why the so called fate is cruel to me? I lost my elder brother, Babu and younger brother Purusha. Then my son, Chiman was removed from the government service two years ago for the so called inefficiency. He is still unemployed getting no job anywhere".....

Hearing Durga's plight the priest was sad. He sighed deeply.

Durga continued his monologue enumerating the tale of woes:

"I made several appeals and petitions to the Governor for financial assistance taking into consideration our service to the city of Bombay in the past and our grave financial crisis in the present. Only after I mentioned that we are starving for days together without a single foodgrain to eat, after a long time the Governor sanctioned us a monthly pension of Rs.30/- which is not at all sufficient by any standard."

The priest was not aware of these developments. His mouth fell open first out of surprise and then sadness. Dumbfounded he looked at Durga's face unbelieving. "I never knew you people are in such difficulties." He exclaimed, "Like every one else around here who knows your family, I thought you people are somehow managing!"

"What show can we manage residing in a two room tenement living in poverty? Can we, the heirs of the once famous Rama Kamati the worthy son of Bombay, tell these things publicly? This sum of thirty rupees a month, what can we buy out of it? For the last several years I could not afford to buy one new sari for my wife!" His voice choked.

Knowing not what to tell the priest somehow felt that he had to console. Therefore he affectionately asked, "My friend, have you ever been to the sea-shore?"

Durga looked confused for a moment at the sudden change of the topic. "Why sea-shore?" He laughed. "My father had five large ocean-going ships. Once I had even gone on a voyage to Muscat."

"Well, going on a voyage and watching the sea from the shore, these are two different things." The priest explained slowly: "Go to the sea-shore and watch. Sometimes the sea comes closer to the shore swelling with the waves rising high and high and sometimes, the same sea water rolls back and back and goes far away from the shore with waves almost disappearing or appearing as wavelets".....

"Yes!" Durga accepted: "We call it high tide or low tide depending upon the water level."

"Good!" The priest was encouraged by his answer: "On some days in the morning there is a high tide but on the same day in the evening there will be a low tide. On some days in the morning there is a low tide but in the evening there will be a high tide".

"Yes! I have seen it for myself!" Durga's eyes shone.

"All that I wanted to tell you is that both the high tide and the low tide are only temporary and they never remain constant. Similarly in our life there are ups and downs like the tide. Let us accept as they come!"

"But here the things are different!" Durga, not willing to accept said, "My father was ruined and his name too. Now generation after generation this family may have to carry on with that deep mark of a traitor, even though he was not! Then how can we pull on without any help from any source? My son is unemployed and even to start a small business he needs an outlay of a couple of thousands. Who will lend us a helping hand?"

"Why? Do you have any doubt?" The priest asked very confidently.

Not being able to follow what he meant Durga asked, "Did you tell something?"

"Yes!" The priest in a clear tone declared: "Today you have opened up your heart and outpoured all your feelings at the feet of Lord Venkataramana, the deity of daily worship by your family. You are serving him with utmost devotion by offering tulsi leaves and flowers

everyday. Take it from me that your prayers will never go unanswered. Believe me!"

As if to say 'yes' a devotee entered the temple and rang the bell thrice. Hearing the sound of the bell they stopped conversing and stood up. Durga now thought of returning home. He joined his palms in salutation to the deities, picked up the plate and taking leave of the priest, left the temple, with a light heart hoping for better days ahead.

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2. SELL THE NOSE- RING TO SAVE THE HONOUR

Exactly after a week :

In the morning, after visiting the temple when Durga was taking his usual breakfast of conjee meal, he heard a gentle knock at the door.

Hearing the knock, his wife left the kitchen hurriedly and opened the door. A person in uniform was standing at the threshold. On seeing her he announced that he had come from the Castle on official duty. Hearing the word 'castle', anxiously she surveyed him questioningly without uttering a single word. The official joined his palms to say "Namaste" and politely enquired, "Madam, is Mr. Kamati in?"

"Yes!" She replied meekly: "He is taking breakfast." She wanted to know the purpose of his visit. But before she could ask, her eyes caught sight of a horse carriage with the Union Jack, waiting on the street. As though he had read her mind, the official declared. "I have come from the Castle. His Excellency the Governor of Bombay has desired that Mr. Durga Kamati should be present at 11.00 A.M. tomorrow at the Council Hall of the Castle."

The word "Governor" made her more nervous. Her tongue dried up, body perspired and heart started beating like a drum. Fortunately for her, quickly finishing his breakfast Durga came out wiping hands on the shawl on his shoulder. Looking at the official he eagerly inquired, "What's the matter?"

The official handing over a closed envelope addressed to Durga

said respectfully: "Sir, these are the orders of the Governor of Bombay. Please be present at 11.00 A.M. in the Castle tomorrow. At half past ten this carriage will come to pick you up." He pointed to the carriage and called out the name of the carriage driver."Yes, sir!" The driver responded.

"See, tomorrow morning at half past ten you have to be here to pick up this gentleman, understand?" The official ordered.

"Yes, sir!" Promptly said the driver obediently, "I will!"

Then the official proffering a sheet of paper asked Durga to sign against his name an acknowledgement for having received the orders. While signing Durga expressed innocently, "Hope nothing untoward will happen."

"Why, sir?" The official smiled and remarked, "If something else were to happen why should the government carriage be sent to your doors to pick you up to go over to the Castle?"

"Yes! That is very sensible!" Durga agreed with his views. After hearing the conversation attentively his wife heaved a sigh of relief. The official saluted and then took leave. As soon as he left Durga opened the envelope and took out the orders. It read:

"Durga Kamati, Esqr. is hereby ordered to attend to the proceedings of His Excellency, the Governor of Bombay at 11.00 A.M. tomorrow in the Council Hall of the Bombay Castle in connection with the Trial of Rama Kamati (deceased) held in the year 1720 A.D. and subsequent appeal, pleading not guilty made by him to the Court of the Honourable East India Company to order for a re-trial."

Durga read out the orders to his wife, and felt "Why this matter has come up now, that too after twenty three long years? This is strange and mysterious. Really beyond comprehension."

His wife did not respond immediately. After a time slowly she asked, "Should you go to the Castle and attend to the proceedings? What will happen if you abstain?" She was looking terribly worried.

"Why should I abstain?" Durga was looking uncommonly bold and courageous: "They have brought about complete destruction of our family and now nothing is left out. When we are drenched and drowned where is the fear of chilliness? I shall go to the Castle, attend to the

proceedings and face everything boldly! Since they want to dispose of my father's appeal at least let me be present as his heir and see for myself how they will bungle while disposing it off. Since he is no longer alive to contradict anything it would be just one more drama and now itself I can predict the outcome. Therefore I find no reason to keep away. On this pretext at least I can pay a visit to the Castle and meet the Governor."

"But," the lady cautioned: "Please be careful when you express your views. Out of frustration let us not speak irrelevant things and antagonise the authorities. They say even the truth if unpleasant must never be told. After all, people in the positions of power can cause any harm any moment if they so desire."

"Don't you worry!" He assured. "So long as Lord Venkataramana is at my back to protect, little do I care for anything or anybody. I will remain calm, composed - and silent during the proceedings and speak only if I am asked to. After all the doors were shut twenty three years ago and now there is no chance of their being opened to receive us!" With her anxiety and doubts completely gone after hearing his words, now she had only one question to ask: "Tomorrow what dress will you wear?"

Durga pondered for a while and then answered, "Sorry! About my dress I have not thought of so far. When I am going to meet the supreme authority of the island I must wear something.appealing, you see!"

"I am glad you are conscious!" Appreciating, she suggested, "You have the silk shirt stitched at the time of wedding. That is still good. However the silk turban has small holes here and there. Yet it can be managed. I am only sorry that we do not have a good 'dhoti' to match the silk shirt. Please buy one. Then those worn out sandals - the more I look at the more do I hate them. Please throw them away and get new ones".... She persuaded as affectionately as she could.

"But where is the money? I don't have even a single *ree*-the copper coin, in my purse leave alone silver and gold." With a heavy heart Durga expressed his helplessness .

The word 'gold' stirred her imagination, She thought for a while

and said, "Don't you worry!" Then in the next instant she went to a corner, unscrewed her nose-ring, took out from the nose and came back smiling. Proffering she told, "Sell this and buy a dhoti and a pair of sandals!"

"What?" Unbelieving Durga looked at her bare nose. He first felt ashamed and then was overwhelmed at her offer. He felt like weeping but being unable to do so bowed down his head lost in thoughts and thoughts.

But his wife! That noble lady the very custodian of the family's tradition and honour went close, took his right hand, opened his palm, placed the nose-ring and as politely as she could, consoled, "You are the only surviving son of the famous Rama Kamati, the great son of Bombay. Today we might be poor and destitute but not long ago we were wealthy, respectable and were known as men of words and deeds. Why portray a poor picture of the noble family even though misfortune has befallen us?"

Dumbfounded Durga looked at her face knowing not what to do. During their heydays she was draped in silk and gold but today! Instead of silk she was wearing a faded cotton sari that too torn and stiched all over. In the place of artistic bangles of solid gold, around her arms were now the cheap and breakable bangles of glass. Instead of the sacred black beads woven in a gold chain they were in a cotton thread around her neck. And her face and figure so charming and graceful was now looking pale and rickety with the constant pangs of poverty. Being unable to bear the sight any longer Durga got emotionally upset. In a loud tone he said "This nose-ring is the last straw and I do not wish to barter even if the whole world is offered against this treasure. I shall put on my usual dress and let the Governor see for himself our wretched condition!" Outstretching his palm he asked her to take back.

But his wife! Not willing to accept pleaded vehemently: "I too am the daughter-in-law of this great family of Kamats, with duties cast on me to preserve the honour and dignity of the family and therefore I too have a say in the matters concerning the family. After all this nose-ring is nothing but a tiny speck of gold. Why can't you appreciate my views? Am I not your better-half sharing with your joys and sorrows?

Over years offering excuses have I ever disobeyed, complained, resented or gone against any of your wishes?" Her throat choked, tears flooded the eyes and she could not continue her words any longer. She wept. Yes, like a child for the first time in many years! Her feelings touched his heart and tears outweighed his sentiments. Without muttering a single word thereafter, he took the nose-ring and obediently went out to buy the dhoti and new sandals as desired by her!

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3. JUSTICE DELAYED AND DENIED TOO!

The next day -

As usual at dawn Durga got ready to go to the temple to attend the morning puja. As he was wont to, he waited for his wife for the offering of the plate of tulsi leaves and flowers but it was not forthcoming. After a few moments of waiting he called out her name loudly and asked for the plate. From the kitchen she answered, "Please wait for a moment!"

In the next instant she appeared with the plate and said, "Let us go!"

For a while Durga was puzzled. With a smile she clarified: "To-day I would like to accompany you to the temple. It is ages since I visited the temple."

"Good!" Durga liked the idea. "In fact sometime ago I wanted to suggest that you should accompany me every day!"

"Every day? Good God!" She laughed: "Early hours of the morning are the most precious ones for every house-wife who loves her family. Why should she go to the temple every day when her home itself is the temple and family, the presiding deity? Now let's go!" In quick paces they reached the temple. The priest was waiting for Durga's arrival. When he saw both the husband and wife, - wife coming to the temple after a long time he was surprised but did not speak out.

The tulsi leaves and flowers were offered to the deities and after chanting a few hymns, the priest sought permission to offer the 'arti' as a mark of respect to his wife. Durga nodded his head in assent and thereafter both the husband and wife went close to the bells hanging overhead. They started ringing devoutly when the 'arti' was offered to the deities. 'Arti' over, they received the sacred flames.

The priest then repeated the everyday prayer for the welfare of Durga's family and the city of Bombay. With this the puja was over and the priest as usual proffered a tulsi leaf to Durga and a flower to his wife as a mark of benediction.

She wore the flower, joined her palms in salutation to the deities and closed her eyes for a while in a silent prayer. Then addressing the priest she said, "After a long time I have come to the temple today and that too not without any purpose".....

"In fact I wanted to ask!" The priest eager to know, interrupted.

She respectfully bowed and said, "You are one among the only few well-wishers of our family".....

"Why me alone?" He pointed to the pedestal on which were standing the deities looking bright and beautiful in the glow of the burning wicks. He said in a consoling tone: "When they are here, why do you need any support from the human beings!"

"But", she slowly said, "deities can't come in person on every occasion rushing help to the poor and the needy. They have got to get things done only through the mortals!"

"You are absolutely right!" The priest highly appreciated her views: "After all we are all His tools".....

Encouraged by his words she told, "To-day is an important day in our life"....

Durga interrupted inbetween only to add: "Yes. The Governor of Bombay has asked me to be in the Castle today at eleven o'clock in the forenoon!"

"But why?" The priest was stunned. The dreadful memory of that treacherous trial of Rama Kamati - his benefactor - was still fresh in his

memory. "May that not happen to his progeny." He offered a silent prayer closing his eyes for a while.

Durga calmly replied, "The Governor's order indicates that the appeal made by my father some twenty years ago against the life imprisonment is going to be disposed off to-day. Therefore I am asked to be present."

Hearing, the priest was taken aback. While his white complexioned face became red out of excitement, without batting eyelids he kept on gazing at the idols as though he was in direct communication with the Lord Almighty seeking His guidance and grace.

After sometime he stopped gazing at the idols and as if he had already received the celestial message his countenance returned to the normal complexion. But in the next few moments his face brightened up, eyes shone and voice became clear.

In a very clear voice he eloquently said, "Durga dear, without any anxiety do go to the Castle and meet the Governor. I am certain that no harm will be caused to you. As you have the fullest protection of the Lord of lords there should not be any cause for anxiety." His words brought in a lot of comfort, confidence and courage to Durga and his wife. They touched his feet, sought his blessings and then left the temple feeling greatly relieved.

Exactly at half past ten, the horse drawn carriage came to his door and announced the arrival. Durga in his turban, silk shirt, new 'dhoti' and new sandals took leave of his wife and son and got into the carriage.

Standing at the threshold of the house both his wife and son watched him taking his seat majestically in the carriage. When the driver asked, "Shall we?" he nodded affirmatively and then waved his hand to his wife and son who waved back but very meekly. The carriage then sped away towards the Castle.

As the carriage entered the huge iron gates of the Castle, his mind brought back the memories of the good old days when his father's fame had reached the zenith. Was he not accompanying him to the Castle almost every day on horseback? Yes! His father was the Commander of

the native troops and as his son what a respect he was commanding throughout the length and breadth of those seven islands of Bombay.....

His thoughts were disturbed as the carriage stopped in front of the Council Hall and the driver politely pointed out that they had already reached the destination.

The same official who had delivered to Durga the orders the previous day was waiting there to receive him.

"Good-morning, Mr. Kamati ! " He greeted cheerfully.

"Good-morning! Good-morning!" Durga reciprocated heartily.

The official then led Durga inside the Council Hall which he was entering after twenty five years! Although it was the same hall that he used to visit with his father those days, now everything looked new and strange. He looked round and surveyed: The elevated dais covered with a red carpet; the high seat looking like a throne kept in the centre of the dais for the Governor to sit on; the backdrop of the awe-inspiring English standard - the Union Jack and in front, the neatly arranged rows of chairs with sufficient space inbetween to move about, for the audience to sit on. As he was standing and looking round like this, the official requested Durga to be seated on one of the chairs in the row third from the dais. Making sure that Durga sat comfortably he excused himself away.

It was nearing eleven o'clock but the hall remained empty. At eleven the bell rang and a few Englishmen entered and walked to the seats in the front row. As soon as they sat down, after a few moments, a guard in red uniform and a black headgear came out from the side entrance of the dais and announced, "His Excellency, the Governor!" Hearing the announcement everybody in the hall, including Durga stood up and in the next instant he could see the Governor emerging from the side entrance, followed by two guards majestically walk towards his high seat.

The Governor was clad in sparkling white trousers and tight buttoned long white coat with yellow embroidery on the shoulders. He had a white navy hat on his head and was wearing shiny black shoes. From his waist belt symbolising the authority was hanging

the ceremonial sword studded with gems.

As a mark of respect everyone in that assembly bowed down his head and as soon as the Governor took his seat all sat down except those two guards who stood in waiting on either side of the Governor. It was a small audience and the Governor smiled graciously looking at the people there. Then he signalled to the Secretary sitting in the front row to commence the proceedings. The Secretary with a bunch of papers in hand went to the dais, stood a little away from the Governor and addressed:

"Your Excellency the Governor, Esteemed Members of the Council and Mr. Durga Kamati,

"I have pleasure in bringing to the notice of everyone here that we have recently received from England the despatch dated 5th March, 1743 containing the verdict of the Court Committee of the Honourable East India Company disposing off the appeal made by Mr. Rama Kamati and his Secretary Govindji against the trial and thereafter imprisonment for life of Rama Kamati on the serious charges of treason.

"Now I hereby declare and pronounce that the Court Committee of the Honourable Company has been pleased to reverse the conviction and acquit Mr. Rama Kamati of all the charges and declares him to be guiltless and innocent.

"I repeat, declares him to be guiltless and innocent. Then the Court Committee on being informed that his confiscated estate had been undervalued, is pleased to order the payment of a sum of Four Thousand Rupees to his heirs.

"The Court has also directed us to find out and if available bring to books the persons who had conspired against Rama Kamati giving false witnesses and resorting to making use of fake seals and forgery. Thank you."

The Governor nodded his head in approval and the Englishmen applauded on hearing the final verdict. Durga heard each and every word with rapt attention. The verdict brought him no cheer. When his father was innocent they tried to prove him guilty and when he was loyal they took him to be a traitor. Then, when he was wealthy, confiscating all his wealth they reduced him to poverty and when he deserved tender care

and respect in his old age they condemned him to die in a prison.

The only consolation was ,officially his father was declared innocent and guiltless and the blot on his family was completely removed from the government records. But why this proclamation was made in this Council Hall in front of a small gathering privately when it deserved full publicity?

Then, what about his father's land, buildings, orchards, coconut gardens, paddy fields and tobacco farms confiscated by the government as a punishment and adjusted to his so called debts to the State?

Instead of honourably restoring the property how could they pay only Rs.4000/- diplomatically terming it as the difference in valuation?

If his father's trial was a mockery this could very well be called a farce.....

As he was thinking like this, the Secretary declared that the business of the Council for the day was over. The guard announced the departure of the Governor. Every one stood up and mechanically bowed.

As soon as the Governor had left, the Englishmen too, and the official who had earlier led Durga, reappeared. He brightly smiled at Durga and heartily wished, "I hope everything went off smoothly."

"Yes! Very smoothly indeed!", Durga taunted without looking at the official.

"The carriage is waiting and will drop you back. But before that I have a small official duty to perform!" He took out some papers.

"What is that official duty?" Durga enquired questioningly looking fixedly at the paper.

"Oh, nothing in particular. It is a voucher for Rupees Four Thousand and this is the form of the receipt for the amount of undervaluation due to you. You can sign the receipt on the front and the voucher at the back. I shall accompany you to the Treasury where you will get Rupees Four Thousand immediately on production of the receipt and the voucher together. The Governor has already given orders to the Treasury Officer."

Durga pondered: Should he obtain the payment or reject and make

an appeal that the valuation was arbitrary and Rupees Four Thousand was too small a sum? But where was the guarantee that the appeal would be considered in his favour? When his father's appeal took twentythree years for disposal his might take forty years or who knew it might take even four hundred years.

So he decided to obtain the payment and asked the official, "Can we go to the Treasury now?"

"Yes!" Said the official.

They went to the Treasury where Durga received the payment. Taking leave of the official, then he proceeded to his home with four bags of Rs.1000/- each in one rupee silver coins. When the carriage reached, he could see his wife and son eagerly waiting for him.

Durga got down from the carriage and called his son, Chiman, to assist him in lifting the bags. Carrying two bags each they went inside.

Keeping the bags before god's niche, Durga folded his hands and whispered a thanksgiving prayer to the deities. After watching everything silently his wife went close. Beholding her for a while he heaved a sigh of relief, took his turban and passed on to her. As he did not open his mouth, she enquired inquisitively, "What has happened?"

" They have declared Father to be innocent and guiltless and acquitted of all the charges heaped on him. They have also paid Rs.4000/ - as a difference in valuation of the properties confiscated"....

On hearing her eyes shone. "Really?" she asked enthusiastically but added: "The final verdict came very late that too after two decades and who has the mood now to rejoice or celebrate?"

Durga's mind was still crowded with mixed feelings. He suggested, "We shall offer a special puja to our family deity, Lord Venkataramana. After all, the stain on the family is wiped once and for all!"

"What stain?" She raised her voice not willing to accept his views: "Did you believe that father was a traitor? Atleast I never thought so! He was like a lion facing everything boldly. Can the lion ever take to the cunning ways of a fox? Just think! He never cared for the trial, the life imprisonment nor the death in the prison." After breathing deeply she stated, "Let us not belittle that noble soul terming the trial as a blot on

our family." She paused for a while, threw a glance at the deities in the god's niche and eloquently pronounced: "Even though they have declared him to be innocent and guiltless today, the barbaric trial will remain as an indelible mark and everlasting blot on the administration of the English and their cruel system of imparting justice. And people will certainly remember the great Rama Kamati and his heroic deeds so long as they remember the story of Bombay and her people!"

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4. BOMBAY DOWN THE STREAM OF TIME

This is Bombay.

But this is not the peninsular Bombay of today-the twentieth century-famed as the financial capital of India, with a crore of population living either in the soaring sky-scrapers indicating resounding prosperity with only a few, or in the slums around the marshy swamps suggesting abject poverty shared by the million others.

Again this Bombay is not the one with roads and roads with endless lines of vehicles packed with people and people and pavements crowded with pedestrians and pedestrians walking down and pedlars and pedlars shouting the names of their wares for a rupee or two.

This Bombay is a cluster of seven insignificant and sparsely populated islands called Old Women's Island at the southern most tip also known as Colaba; the Island of Bombay consisting of the City and the Malabar Hill and thereafter in the east, going northwards the Islands of Mazgaon, Parel and Matunga respectively. Then to the west, going again northwards the Islands of Worli and Mahim. Beyond Mahim is the Mahim Creek separating the Island of Salsette from the territory of Bombay. The three eastern islands are separated from the two western ones by the sea inbetween which is shallow and during low tide one could wade through the sea or walk down along the sea-bed when all the

seven islands are temporarily knit together to form one single island like the children hugging their mother from all the sides. During high tide when the sea water enters the low lying areas and separates the islands they look like the children playing individually, each child left to itself. This Bombay poetcially described as the seven gems set in the silvery sea, has a sparse population of around sixty thousand engaged in fishing, toddy tapping,farming, trading and in a small way Government Service. This Bombay has the lush green vegetation round the year and therefore it is also called Bombay Green.

. This Bombay with lines and lines of trees and palms, gardens and farms has lured our heart and hark: It is calling us outstretching warmly both of its arms to receive and greet us and surprisingly here is a boat with a banner, "Welcome to Bombay" waiting for us. The boatman, in a ceremonious dress, waves his hands inviting us to board. When this is the case why should we linger or delay? Let us go to this Bombay. We now travel - yes - travel three centuries back down the stream of time and the boat man says he will take us round the cluster of seven islands to have a closer look. Accordingly we commence our voyage from the entry point of Bombay harbour - the southern most tip. From the sea, we can see the smallest of all the seven islands the Old Women's Island known as Kolabhat or Colaba full of coconut trees. See how they sway in the powerful sea breeze! Look at those large bunches of coconuts in each tree. The land must be very fertile. Otherwise there can't be bunches and bunches of coconuts like this. The major activity here is fishing and we can see the fishing boats dotting the sea and also the fishermen's huts on the shore. As our boat sails westwards we can see the crescent shaped shore of the Island of Bombay, the most prominent of all the seven islands. It has the city of Bombay in the east around Bombay harbour and the Malbar Hill in the west stretching northwards from far off tip of the crescent. As we sail, we can see the densely grown trees on the hills and on the shore, shrines and temples - Walukeshwar being the most sacred among them but in ruins now, in this Bombay.

Northwards our boat sails past the Island of Worli with banyan trees and fishermen's huts. Thereafter we move on to Mahim, the ancient city of Mahikavati, the capital of the Hindu kings who had ruled over Bombay for centuries before it was lost to the Muslim kings of

Gujarat. In this island we see a lot of activities taking place - fishing, boat building, trading and farming of paddy and tobacco. There are also lines and lines of coconut and palmyra trees that provide for toddy tapping. From the Arabian sea now our boat takes a right turn and enters the curved bay of Mahim and then the Mahim River which in fact is a creek that separates the seven islands from the island of Salsette. This river, like any other is not straight but a meandering one. As we sail through we can see now the densely grown palmyra trees and fishermens' huts is Sinva, the bordering village in the Island of Matunga. The Mahim creek joins the Arabian Sea in the east and from here the distant hills on the mainland are cleanly looming. The boat now takes a turn southwards. On the way are the remaining two Islands Parel and Mazgaon. On the shore the activity is fishing and slightly interior, farming.Here also palmyra trees are plenty and so toddy tapping is one of the major activities. There are endless lines of banyan and tamarind trees and therefore from the sea these islands are looking green and green only.

Our boat now reaches the Bombay harbour,deep and spacious enough to handle any number of vessels, humming with activity of loading and unloading of ships. The boatman halts our boat for a while to have a good look. Look at those ocean going vessels! How large they are, with the Union Jack - the English flags fluttering proudly in the sea breeze! The trade between Bombay and the other parts of the world is in the hands of the East India Company that owns and rules this Bombay. Through this harbour only, the city is carrying on trade with the neighbouring states also. The exports from Bombay include dryfish, coconuts, tobacco, low priced cloth and minerals like lead and iron and the imports include paddy, timber, spices and other merchandise of daily use. The islands do not produce all that they require and so the inhabitants have to rely heavily on the neighbouring towns and villages for the supply of various commodities of the daily use. As the islands are not connected with the mainland and are surrounded by the sea, the boats and country-crafts are extensively used as a means of transportation both for commodities and people.

Bombay is gaining importance day by day because of the good navigational facilities available round the year. Its strategic position and ideal location is well realised by the seafaring people like the Portuguese and the English, but not by the native rulers and monarchs who

still think of this Bombay as obscure and insignificant fishing islands.

After having a close look of the busy harbour, now our boat is slowly moving towards the Castle of Bombay - the seat of the Government of Bombay, headed by the Governor and assisted by a Deputy Governor and the Council, consisting of three to five members, all of them are English gentlemen appointed by the Honourable East India Company in England.

The time taken for a voyage from England to Bombay is around eight months which means a letter from England to Bombay takes eight months to reach and a to that letter will also take the equal time if promptly given. This is natural because the only mode of transportation is the large ocean-going vessel and the distance to be covered is almost 10000 miles. Therefore, the local administration consisting of the servants of the Company will decide on everything, safeguarding the interests of their masters and submit comprehensive reports on all that is happening in Bombay.

Presently the English are only the traders shrewd enough to seek only the profits in business without exhibiting outwardly any signs of territorial ambitions. The reason could be the vast Moghul Empire under the powerful monarch, Aurangzeb in the North and the most powerful Shivaji in the Deccan. Then the Portuguese occupying Salsette beyond the Mahim creek are superior to the English in naval power and to the south of Bombay not too far in the island of Janjira are Siddis, owing allegiance to the Moghul Emperors. Of late Marathas too have embarked on increasing their strength in the sea not only in the vicinity of Bombay but also in the Konkan and farther south.

The surrounding sea has afforded natural protection to Bombay. Yet its position is very vulnerable because of the constant threats by the powerful neighbours as well as the pirates who in the past made surprise raids on the unguarded shores and snatched away men, cattle, farm produce and wealth in any form besides burning down rows and rows of huts and dwellings of the residents, sheerly as acts of cruelty. Therefore, the inhabitants here have to live in constant fear and threats without any protection of the rulers in Bombay.

On 23rd June 1661, a wedding took place. Not in Bombay but in

the far off lands of Europe. It was not an ordinary wedding but a royal wedding. The King of England Charles II married the Princess of Portugal, Catherine of Braganza. The Monarch of Portugal gave away as dowry this cluster of seven islands and King Charles II promptly leased them out to the East India Company at an annual rent of Pounds 10. By then the Company had established factories in Surat in the Moghul domain but they always desired to have their own tiny land where they could be of their own. It is learnt that they had set their sight on Bombay some years ago but were too timid to snatch it away from the powerful Portuguese.Now the wedding happily resolved the problem. The English crown got a queen and the East India Company, a place of their choice. But the Portuguese Governor of Goa who was in charge of administration of Bombay did not view the dowry very kindly. He wrote to the King to retain Bombay at any cost as by then he had realised that those "who own Bombay will rule over India." But his words were not heeded to as the King of England had already become the son-in-law of Portugal. Bombay was thus reluctantly ceded to the English much against the wishes of the local Portuguese authorities.

Well, after viewing from the sea the Castle of Bombay with a large Union Jack fluttering atop its tower, our tour came to an end. The boat was slowly brought to the wharf. Taking leave of the boatman, we got down and went straight to the famous Bombay Bazar. The Bazar Street running straight from South to North in the middle of the Bazar looked like the main artery of Bombay. On both sides of the Street were shops and shops of grains, cloth, provisions, cutlery, jewellery, metals and minerals and other merchandise required for the day to day life. The main street was branching off here and there into lanes and by-lanes to have shops and shops again. Interestingly the business here was not in the hands of only one community but was distributed almost equally in the hands of Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Christians. This cosmopolitan character in perfect harmony was perhaps the outcome of the liberal religious policy pursued by the English who from time to time would make official announcements that people of all religious faith could come and settle down in Bombay pursuing their own faith and vocation and the Administration in no way would interfere in the personal matters, especially the trade and religion. Since this was in

sharp contrast to the policies adopted by the earlier rulers like the Portuguese and the Muslims, people in Bombay seemed to be less worried about religion.

We then proceeded to the famous Mapla Por not far off from the Bazar. At the entrance of the Por itself we came across with a huge building with a conspicuous signboard reading as M/s Ramagee Comagee, Shroffs and Merchants, Bombay. It was a two-storeyed building, ground floor used as a godown for storing farm produces and the first floor in the front an office and at the rear, a residence. There was a separate entrance for the residence with an independent pathway leading to it.

We took the pathway leading to the residence. At the end of the pathway we came across a pedestal-like structure on which was standing a tulsi plant that looked serene and beautiful and except this small but sacred plant there was no other plant, creeper or a tree in the front yard.....

A servant noticing, came down to receive us joining his palms respectfully.

"We have come here to meet Rama Kamati but the sign board says Ramagee Comagee. Is it one and the same person?" We asked.

"Oh, yes!" The servant explained: "Some years ago an Englishman pronounced by mistake his name that way and my master liked it very much. He took it as a nickname and now he is extensively using it. Though it sounds like a Gujarati name he is not from Gujarat but from Goa. In fact his father, a Goud Saraswat Brahmin, had migrated from Goa when Bombay was under Portuguese rule. Since then the family is here taking Bombay to be the mother-land!".....

"Can we meet Mr. Kamati if he is free?" We enquired.

"Why not?" The servant said, "He is free and you can definitely meet. Let's go!"

He climbed the staircase and step by step we followed him.

The door was wide open and the servant entering, said, "Please come in!"

As we entered the spacious hall, we could see a young man sitting majestically on a high seat. Behind his seat, high on the wall were fixed

two swords one crossing the other beneath a shield. Smiling graciously the young man with a pleasing personality stood up to greet us. As he stood up we quickly surveyed him: white complexion, dark hair, trimmed moustaches and broad shoulders: Tall and robust body with a broad chest and above all the enchanting sparkle in the eyes.

When he heartily smiled, it looked as if the entire hall was lit up with the brightness of his smile.

"Must be Rama Kamati's son!" We presumed and asked, "Where is your father? We have come here to meet and pay our respects to him."

"My father?" The young man asked rather surprised: "My father is no more. He died seven years ago."

Hearing this we were stunned, "Then Rama Kamati?..... Hearing his name and fame eagerly we have come here to meet him!"

The young man heartily laughed and declared, "I am the same Rama Kamati whom you are eager to meet".....

Unbelieving,we expressed, "Really? You look so young!" Wreathed in smiles, he clarified: "I am barely twenty five!"

"Twentyfive?" We did not believe: "So young and yet so famous?"

He threw up his arms pointing to the heaven and modestly declared: "Here in this home, everything takes place by God's grace!"

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5. THE CORONATION OF A GREAT KING

In Bombay the monsoon had already set in. The sky, looking dark and heavy was mercilessly pouring down in torrents as though the clouds were crashing and falling. Accompanying the heavy rains were roaring thunders and dazzling flashes of lightning coming one after the other without any break. Then the wind moving at a terrific speed was blowing away whatever stood on its way, banana plants or banyan trees, palmyra trees or coconut palms, thatched roofs or muddy walls. When

the rains would lash like this bringing in discomfort and distress to Bombay, its child - the sea getting agitated, would become furious. Then not willing to remain calm it would swell, surge, roar and becoming rough would send the billows high as if in a direct combat with the sky.

When it was raining like this the activities on both the land and the sea had come to a halt and people preferred to be indoors.

On a Sunday, in the afternoon when it was raining heavily Rama Kamati heard a knock at the door. Although there was a servant closeby, Rama Kamati himself opened the door and to his surprise outside the threshold was standing Narayan Shenoy completely wet though holding an umbrella. Shenoy, an elderly person, was a well-wisher of the family since good old days and when Rama Kamati's father was alive he was a frequent visitor. Therefore, as soon as he saw, Rama Kamati bowed, touched his feet as a mark of respect, and said, "Shenoy uncle, your clothes are completely drenched. Please come in and have the clothes changed immediately. I shall get you a 'dhoti' and a shawl to wear." He asked his servant to get them and instantly the servant brought a dhoti and a shawl and also a towel to wipe moisture on the body.

"I never thought that the rains will pour in this way. When I started it was only drizzling." He said smiling as he was wiping with the towel. Then he wore the dhoti and the shawl in the place of his wet clothes. With this when he looked comfortable, Rama Kamati respectfully requested him to be seated.

"The rains are unabating". Narayan Shenoy made a general remark: "The astrologers predict that they will continue like this for a week or even more."

Rama Kamati smiled and added: "This year the rains seem to have started with a great vigour. Just see! The overcast sky is so dark that it looks as if it is midnight now although it is afternoon. Well, uncle - would you like to have a glass of hot milk to keep you warm?"

"Oh, yes! I welcome it!" Heartily said Narayan Shenoy without any hesitation.

Rama Kamati signalled and the servant went in to fetch the hot milk.

Narayan Shenoy looked round and said, "I think it is more than a year since I paid a visit"..... He was apologetic.

"Never mind, uncle!" Said Rama Kamati in a consoling tone: "People in service, especially Government, have a lot of important duties to attend. I came to know that you were out of Bombay for the past few months."

"Yes! I was away on official work"..... Before he could complete, the servant came in with the milk. Handing over the glass he withdrew himself allowing them to continue the conversation.

Sipping the hot milk slowly, Narayan Shenoy looked up for a while and suddenly to his view came the shield and the swords neatly kept crossed on the wall. Astounded, he stared at them for a while and then slowly said, "The shield and the swords here give an awe-inspiring look to your house. I suppose they are only the show-pieces!"

"Show-pieces?" Rama Kamati grinned, "Shenoy uncle, they are not! In fact I use them." He stood up instantly, and drew out one of the swords swiftly. Holding high he turned it briskly again and again showing how sharp its blade was. When he was turning, the sharp edge was shining brightly much to the bewilderment of Narayan Shenoy!

He drank some more milk and remarked, "Last time when I came, were these swords here?"

Rama Kamati kept back the sword in its place behind the shield and slowly explained, "Uncle, I have nothing to hide from you. Without anybody's knowledge I was learning how to wield the swords. Only after I had fully mastered this art, I brought these swords and the shield and kept them here."

"Good!" Appreciated Narayan Shenoy: "I am happy you did it. Now tell me how do you utilise these? Would you like to join the armed forces?"

"Oh, no! Not at all!" Rama Kamati hastened to declare: "I learnt this only to use as a defence against any attack. I have absolutely no intention to go with the sword against anyone. I believe that the arms must be used only as means of protection and not as tools of destruction." His eyes shone.

"That is a good approach, my dear young man!" Narayan Shenoy, a diplomat by profession, dramatically complimented and then slowly revealed, "Do you know, recently I had a chance to behold the most precious sword in the world?"

"Which is that precious sword?" Eagerly asked Rama Kamati.

"It is the celestial sword gifted by Mother Goddess Amba Bhavani to Maharaja Shivaji." Narayan Shenoy slowly said, "I could catch the glimpse of the famous sword at very close quarters!"

Rama Kamati was excited and thrilled when he heard about the legendary sword and also the name of that King of kings, Shivaji Raje the very symbol of freedom, strength and justice. He was very eager to know how did Narayan Shenoy get close to that great hero.

Narayan Shenoy gulped the remaining milk, kept the empty glass down and wiped his mouth with the end of the shawl. Then he narrated, "After participating in the coronation ceremony of Shivaji Raje only a week ago I came back from Raighad. What a great event it was! I think it would be remembered by generation after generation as Shivaji Raje is supposed to be an incarnation of Lord Shiva. Really a glorious event befitting a great person!"... Before he could complete the narration, out of excitement Rama Kamati interrupting complained, "Shenoy uncle, you never told any one of us that you would be going to Raigadh. Had I known, definitely I would have joined you. In fact, I have heard about Shivaji Raje's great many noble and heroic deeds. His name is always a source of inspiration to youngsters like me. At least as a spectator I would have loved to be in the audience of the coronation ceremony".... His words were laden with disappointment.

"Rama," said Narayan Shenoy convincingly, "I am sorry. I had gone on official duty as a member of the delegation led by Mr. Oxinden, representing the Government of East India Company in Bombay and so I could not tell anyone about my trip. You know we are supposed to maintain secrecy about the official matters"....

"Now I could follow!" understood Rama Kamati: "Yes. You are in the government service and not as free as I am. Now tell me, Shenoy uncle, all that you have seen at the coronation ceremony."

With a pattering sound it was still raining heavily outside. From the window could be seen the overcast sky with layers and layers of dark clouds. As the intensity of chilliness grew, being unable to bear, Narayan Shenoy asked for a rug. Instantly Rama Kamati went in and brought a woollen blanket. Covering himself comfortably with the blanket, Narayan Shenoy said, "I will not only tell about the coronation but also about some of the events preceding it. You will also know what part did I play in bringing about peace between the English and the Marathas. Listen!" He started the narration, saying like this:

Ever since they came into possession of the islands of Bombay, the English, were under constant fear of attack by the Marathas who were rising as a mighty power in the Deccan. In 1673 the English factories in Hubli were raided and looted by the troops of Shivaji causing heavy damage and loss. At the same time a ship in distress belonging to a merchant in Rajapur was forced to take shelter in Bombay harbour on account of bad weather. Taking advantage of the situation the English attached goods in the ship to bring pressure on Shivaji to compensate the loss incurred in Hubli. But Shivaji disowned the responsibility stating that his troops never looted Hubli.This resulted in some sort of strained relationship between the English and the Marathas and strangely, the English came to know through their spies that Shivaji in retaliation was planning to join hands with the Dutch for the siege of Bombay. So they gave up their right on the goods carried by the ship of Rajapur.

Bombay did not have a strong armed force at her command to defend. People in government service like attendants, clerks, cashiers and accountants were often called upon to wield swords and fight, even though they did not have any formal military training. When that was the situation the authorities felt that instead of hostilities it would be better to have friendly relations with the Marathas. After one or two rounds of inconclusive talks they finally decided to depute as their emissary, Narayan Shenoy, an astute Goud Saraswat Brahmin with very pleasing manners to the court of Shivaji to prepare the ground for entering into a treaty for an everlasting peace. Narayan Shenoy a diplomat by his own right was in the service of the Government of East India Company as an interpreter and linguist with a good command over Urdu, Marathi, English and Portuguese languages besides his own mother tongue,

Konkani.

Yes! Their impression was right. Narayan Shenoy could convince the men at the helm of affairs in the Maratha kingdom to enter into a treaty with the East India Company but it took almost six months for him to get the treaty concluded. Soliciting support for signing the treaty he met everyone in the authority in the Maratha court besides the personal advisers to Shivaji. After meeting Shivaji personally in March, 1674, Narayan Shenoy sent words to his masters in Bombay that Shivaji had agreed to sign the treaty soon after his coronation and they should send their envoy to remain present during the coronation. He also suggested that the envoy should bring in some gifts and presents, befitting the occasion. The Company Administration decided to send Henry Oxinden as their envoy with a gift of gold ornaments worth more than Rs.3000/- specially brought from Surat.

Oxinden accompanied by George Robinson and Thomas Mitchell, left Bombay by boat on 13th May, 1674 and after visiting quite a few places on the way, reached the foot of Raigadh Fort on 19th May. There they stayed in a tent for three days and on 22nd May, they moved up the hill and as the royal guests they were accommodated in the fort standing atop the Raigadh Hill — the venue of the coronation ceremony. During their stay up, it was Narayan Shenoy's duty to take them round to the prominent officers and ministers and introduce them. As a gesture of goodwill they gave gifts of costly silk shawls and diamond rings when they had met the men in the authority.

After four days, on 26th May, Shivaji with his son Sambhaji gave audience to Oxinden and his party. At that time the jewellery was presented and both the king and the prince appreciated their elegance and beauty. Shivaji assured that the request of the Company for a treaty would be considered favourably but it could be signed only after his coronation as he was busy in attending to various religious rituals connected with the coronation. Earlier he had gone to Pratapgadh to visit the temple of Mother Goddess Bhavani where he had offered special puja and prayers besides making an unusual offering of a gold umbrella weighing about 1-1/4 maunds of gold.

On 29th May, Shivaji was weighed in gold coins as a part of the

coronation ceremony and the gold coins used for weighing were distributed to the priests and other brahmins present on the occasion.

The most auspicious moment for ascending the throne came in the early morning of Saturday the 6th June, 1674. It was announced on the previous day that Maharaja Shivaji would give audience in the morning from seven o' clock and all people should gather in the royal court by that time.

The delegation led by Oxinden arrived at the royal court at the appointed time but even before they had reached, the court was packed with people and people to witness the greatest event that would take place in Deccan.

On the high throne with-eight pillars-artistically made of 32 maunds of gold, studded with nine variety of priceless gems was seated majestically Maharaja Shivaji with royal splendour. Close to the throne were the Nobles and Knights in rich clothes waiting on him. When all the people in the court were standing as a mark of respect to the king, Shivaji's son, Sambhaji Raje, Peshwa Moro Pant and the high priest, Gaga Bhat who officiated the religious rituals of coronation, only these three persons of great eminence were seated just below the throne.

Oxinden was accompanied by Narayan Shenoy as it was he who was instrumental in bringing both Shivaji Raje and the East India company together to sign a treaty. From the distance, Oxinden respectfully made obeisance and Narayan Shenoy holding a small casket containing a ring studded with priceless diamonds bowed with all respect. Shivaji Raje saw them and with a smile made gestures signalling to come closer. Both Oxinden and Narayan Shenoy went very close up to the foot of the throne. Oxinden presented the casket and conveyed in English good wishes of his employers, the East India Company and sought peace and good relations. Narayan Shenoy as an interpreter instantly conveyed in Marathi and Shivaji Raje nodding his head to say 'yes!' smiled graciously.

With that their audience was over. Although they stood before the king barely for a few moments they could still see on both the sides of the throne the various emblems and pictures engraved in sheets of metal all kept hanging down from the ceiling but neatly arranged

overhead. To the right-hand side were two great fishes, their head made of gold, with large teeth and to the left-hand side a balance made of gold with both sides on the same level symbolising impartial justice.

The much-awaited peace treaty was signed by Shivaji Raje on the 11th June and by his ministers on the 12th June. On the 13th June they started back and reached Bombay on the 16th June, 1674, when monsoon had already brought Bombay under its sway.....

Like this Narayan Shenoy concluded his narration and looked up questioningly at Rama Kamati who was listening to each and every word with rapt attention.

The narration over, Rama Kamati cordially enquired, "Shenoy uncle, would you like to take some eatables with one more glass of milk?"

"Why not?" He heartily welcomed, "But what about you?"

"I will certainly give you company!" Saying so Rama Kamati clapped his hands and the servant instantly appeared. He ordered to get some eatables and two glasses of hot milk.

Narayan Shenoy looked out of the window. The rain seemed reluctant to recede. He then looked at Rama Kamati and enquired, "How did you like my report on the coronation?"

"Excellent!" acknowledged Rama Kamati, "Shenoy uncle, rather than a mere account of events or your experience in Raighad, I liked the most your concluding the treaty bringing about the peace and prosperity to Bombay. This should be remembered by the people of Bombay forever. Really you are great. I never thought that you could perform such a great feat!...Narayan Shenoy was all humility. He acknowledged the words of appreciation with a smile and pulled the lower edge of the blanket further down to feel the warmth more. Thereafter he slowly said, "After all Bombay is my home-town. I am happy I could serve in my own humble way. I always love Bombay and her people. You know how poorly it is guarded. I have seen for myself how innocent people die like flies everytime when it is invaded." After a while he continued to say, "Now let me announce the purpose of my visit braving this..." He gestured towards the window and continued ..."downpour!".....

Rama Kamati was eager to hear the purpose of his visit. But the

servant entered carrying the plates with snacks and milk. Keeping them on a stool, to be picked up, he left. Rama Kamati took a plate and passed on to Narayan Shenoy. Then he took the other one for himself. Munching, Narayan Shenoy slowly said, "You know my masters, the Government of the East India Company are expanding their activities and they are on the look out for brilliant and enterprising young men for taking up immediate employment. They have asked whether I can secure some...." For his reaction he looked up meaningfully at Rama Kamati's face.

Eating up his share of snacks, Rama Kamati kept the empty plate on the stool and picked up the glass of milk. Keeping the one for himself he passed on the other to Narayan Shenoy. As he started sipping, Narayan Shenoy enquired, "Rama, are you interested in joining the government service?"

Holding the glass of milk, Rama Kamati thought, considered and then hesitated. Instead of giving the answer immediately, he gulped down the milk at a stretch and kept the empty glass aside silently.

Breaking the silence Narayan Shenoy said, "You have heard me now describing my achievements. If I were to confine myself as a trader or a shroff like any other relations of mine, perhaps I would not have a chance to rub shoulders with the ministers of Shivaji Raje or meet the monarch himself. Who knows, one day, you might also be deputed to the court of the Moghul Emperors, Maratha Monarchs or the Prince of Persia. They need men. Men of integrity and loyalty like you."

Bowing down his head Rama Kamati pondered over for some more time but somehow his mind hesitated. "Shenoy uncle," he politely answered, "I am grateful to you. But presently I feel I am too young to shoulder any responsibility outside my business and farming. Let me see the world for some more years and gain experience. Till then, please excuse me."

"As you wish!" Narayan Shenoy drank the milk and kept the glass down, a bit disappointed.

"Uncle, please do not misunderstand me!" Rama Kamati joining his hands pleaded. Narayan Shenoy not reacting, gave only a smile but a faint one.

6. PRAYER FOR PROWESS

Mumbadevi -

Yes, it is the same Mother Goddess Maha Amba, who took the name Mumba in Bombay.

Mumbadevi-

Yes, it is this Mother Goddess that had lent Bombay the very name of Mumbai much before it was called Bombay.

And Mumbadevi-

It is again the same Mother Goddess that after lending her name to the city, stood firmly as the guardian deity protecting for eternity the city as well as all the citizens, answering not only their prayers but also fulfilling their desires.

That way the temple dedicated to Mumbadevi was not far off from Bombay Bazar. It was not even half a mile from Rama Kamati's residence as the crow flew in the North-East direction.

Situated a little away from the usual hustle and bustle and the noise the temple with a serene atmosphere had a great soothing effect on the devotees. The tender sea-breeze throughout the day, the green groves of coconut palms with each tree proudly swaying in the blowing breeze and the high dome of the temple with beautiful and artistic carvings and a saffron coloured sacred flag flying atop were attracting the mind and heart of the people, all over Bombay.

To reach the temple one had to take the straight but long pathway bordering Bombay Bazar, with rows of coconut trees on either side providing a panoramic view.

As one would cross the main entrance the shrine inside would become visible and in the centre of the shrine could be seen Mother Goddess Mumbadevi beautifully adorned with flowers and jewels. In the glow of a big traditional oil lamp with large wicks constantly burning, the graceful deity was always looking lively and effable.

The idol of Mumbadevi consisted of the countenance slightly bigger than the human face, with a coating of dark pink colour but the

wide open eyes white with black pupils were looking natural. On the forehead were three marks of ash above the usual dot of kumkum. She was wearing a large nose-ring strewn with pearls and her heavy ear-rings were studded with precious stones. A high gold crown with twinkling gems was adorning her head. Her neck was full of ornaments with garlands of flowers and flowers and below this decoration was a lion, made of solid gold, suggesting that Mumbadevi was seated majestically on her carrier, the roaring lion. Just behind was kept a golden trident, symbolising the Mother's most loving weapon.

A single look at Mumbadevi was sufficient to instil and inspire confidence and devotion in the heart of the visitors. Therefore, for the people of Bombay a visit to this temple was always a rewarding and refreshing experience.

Well, after the visit of Narayan Shenoy and his mention of Bhavani sword, Rama Kamati, thought that for the people of Bombay, Mumbadevi herself was Bhavani and by constantly praying at her feet, one could realise the dreams. Therefore, he decided that after offering prayers to his family deities in the god's niche at home, everyday in the morning he would visit Mumbadevi's temple and after offering the prayers there, he would commence the day's activities.

Like this six years elapsed and in the first week of April in the year 1680, one day in the morning after offering the prayers to Mumbadevi in the temple, when he was turning back, suddenly he caught sight of Narayan Shenoy entering the temple slowly, clasping his hands devoutly.

Narayan Shenoy too saw Rama Kamati. Greeting he asked, "Rama dear, how are you?"

With a bright smile, Rama Kamati replied, "By Her grace I am fine. But tell me, Shenoy uncle, how are you? It is ages, since we met...."

"Yes! After a long time we meet today!" The elderly diplomat, Narayan Shenoy sighed deeply: "You know, I was very busy. As busy as ever." To Rama Kamati his voice looked as if laden with some unknown pain and sorrow. More than that, Narayan Shenoy was not a regular visitor to the temple at least at this hour of the morning. Evidently something must have happened to bring him to the temple. He thought so and felt like enquiring. "Shenoy uncle, how is that you are here today in the

early morning?"

Narayan Shenoy without giving a reply promptly, tried to smile for a while. Then he asked: "Rama, can you wait for a while? I want to tell you something important. I shall pray and come back in a minute. Then let us go back together."

Rama Kamati agreed.

Narayan Shenoy went in, performed a circumambulation, prostrated and clasping his hands devoutly, offered silent prayers to the deity closing his eyes for a while.

Then he came back looking relieved and patted Rama Kamati on his back and said, "Let us go!"

Rama Kamati noticing it nodded his head in assent and followed him quietly.

They came out of the temple-square and started walking down the pathway with coconut palms on both the sides.

The morning breeze, tender and cool, had a soothing effect. Birds were chirping cheerfully and from a distance could be heard the melodious call of the cuckoo heralding the season of spring. Rama Kamati not opening his mouth was waiting for Narayan Shenoy to speak about the important thing he had mentioned a short while ago. But Narayan Shenoy not breaking the silence was walking bowing his head down as though he was unable to bear the burden of thoughts.

"Perhaps he is hesitating!" thought Rama Kamati and then asked, "Shenoy uncle, you were to tell me something"....

Narayan Shenoy stopped walking and stood in the middle of the pathway. He looked fixedly at Rama Kamati's face and in a low tone sadly said, "Maharaja Shivaji is no more!"

"Really?....." Rama Kamati, unbelieving, stood motionless and speechless for a while. His face became pale and eyes red. Tongue wanted to form a few words but never moved. He bowed his head down out of sorrow, knowing not what to speak.

For him the tidings were hard to believe and the feelings, difficult to control.

Narayan Shenoy came close to him and in a hug said, "Rama dear, ever since I participated in the coronation ceremony, I was feeling that one day Shivaji Raje will conquer the Moghuls and become the undisputed Emperor of Bharat Varsha. But destiny has its own inscrutable ways"....

"Shenoy uncle," Rama Kamati enquired, "was he killed in a battlefield, or.."

Narayan Shenoy was all sorrow to say: "No battlefield, Rama! He suddenly died. They say fever. What fever, God alone knows. Barely fifty years. Death should not have been so cruel to such a noble soul!" Tears streamed from his eyes.

As if to console him Rama Kamati revealed, "Shenoy uncle,to be frank with you, the very name Shivaji has been a great inspiration to me. After you had narrated that day about his coronation it was one of my dreams to see him at least from a distance. Alas! Now my dream has remained only a dream!"

"Rama," wiping his tears Narayan Shenoy said, "I was planning to go on a pilgrimage to Pandharpur after a fortnight. I had also decided that on the way, I should visit Raigadh and pay my respects to Shivaji Raje. Now all my plans are upset!"

"That means will you not go to Pandharpur also?" Rama Kamati eagerly asked.

"You know," Narayan Shenoy frankly declared, "whenever I am in two minds, I pay a visit to Mumbadevi and offer prayers. She always shows me the way"...

Rama Kamati's curiosity knew no bounds: "Then are you here to-day to seek the benediction of Mumbadevi?"

"Yes, of course!" Narayan Shenoy had nothing to conceal. "As soon as I closed my eyes and prayed, Mother Goddess ordained by way of a flash of thought in my mind that I must postpone my pilgrimage." Hearing, Rama Kamati was astounded: "Shenoy uncle,you are really fortunate enough to get solutions to your problems very quickly like this. You know, after you had narrated about Bhavani sword, I am a daily visitor to this temple. But,"....He looked back at the temple for a while.

"Then what has happened?" Narayan Shenoy eager to know interrupted.

"What will happen? Mumbadevi has never communicated to me either her consent or dissent even though I am not praying for a celestial sword."

"Really? Can you tell me what do you pray for?"

"Only prowess and abundant strength to defend my people and myself." His voice became firm: "Shenoy uncle, year after year Siddi's men raid my cocoanut groves and tobacco farms causing a lot of damage and loss. You see, a couple of months ago without any reason they burnt down the huts of my servants in Mazgaon"...

Narayan Shenoy pondered for a while and then asked, "Don't you get even a single flash of thought in mind when you stand and pray before Mumbadevi?"

Rama Kamati did not answer but looked deep into the eyes of Narayan Shenoy who thought for a while and then concluded, "Perhaps Mumbadevi, does not want you to take to arms. After all your father or forefathers were never warriors"....

Rama Kamati heartily laughed. "I am happy you said it, Shenoy uncle! But I want to become a warrior and take a different path away from the beaten track."

"Why does this young man looking after a flourishing business want to become a warrior? What is he upto?" This was still a mystery to Narayan Shenoy. Though Rama Kamati had already given the reason he believed that the exact reason could be different which he did not want to reveal.

Rama Kamati then enquired, "Shenoy uncle, can you tell me when do you propose to go to Pandharpur on pilgrimage?"

"At least not in the near future." Replied he looking at the distant horizon. "Perhaps in the month of October- after Diwali festival. Well, would you like to join me?"

"Oh, I would have loved to !" Rama Kamati exclaimed: "But you know my hands are tied up with business and farming. More than that,

the kids are very young. Babu six, Durga four and Purusha in the cradle is six months old . But Shenoy uncle, before you go, do tell me. I have a small offering to make to Lord Vithoba. Then I request you to bring me from Pandharpur small idols of Vithoba and Rukumayi"....

"I shall definitely bring when I go!" Assured Narayan Shenoy. After a few moments of silence Rama Kamati slowly said, "Shenoy uncle, in fact, I wanted to meet you some time back and seek your advice...Now that we have met, I think I can talk it over here itself."

"Oh, yes." The diplomat said, "Why do you hesitate? Go ahead, my young man!"

"I am too small a person and inexperienced too." Rama Kamati humbly said: "In my house in the god's niche, there are idols of Lord Venkataramana and some other deities worshipped by my father and fore-fathers. For want of time, I am unable to offer puja to the deities everyday. Then I do not know how to chant the hymns either. Therefore, I want to construct a small temple at the end of the Bazar Street in a place belonging to me and install these idols and appoint a priest for daily worship. Then some of my Gujarati friends often complain that there is no place of worship in the Bazar. So I am planning to instal in the same shrine Lord Krishna popularly known as Shyamaliyalal in Gujarat. With this, I want to throw the temple open to all. The idols of Vithoba and Rukumayi which you will bring will be adored in the god's niche of my home thereafter."

Narayan Shenoy attentively listened. After a while he appreciated the idea: "Yours is a noble idea. Very noble indeed! Please go ahead and I am willing to contribute my mite also as there is no temple in the Bazar so far. Let there be one!"

"But Shenoy uncle," Rama Kamati still had a doubt: "Before embarking on the venture - I call it an adventure - tell me frankly what do our present rulers think of our places of worship. I do not wish to burn my fingers! Our earlier rulers were hating our temples and disliking our mode of worship. My father, always used to tell me how they destroyed our most beautiful Walukeshwar Temple"....

Narayan Shenoy silently pondered over the matter and did not react immediately. However, after a while he enquired, "Tell me Rama

who gave you this brilliant idea of constructing a shrine?"

"Why?" Rama Kamati asked, wondering, "Who else could give? I am coming here everyday to offer prayers to Mumbadevi. Whenever I stand before her, my mind says I must construct a shrine for family deities."

"Really?" Narayan Shenoy's eyes shone. "But you have complained a little while ago that Mumbadevi does not answer your prayers!"

"Yes, of course!" He said emphatically. " But whenever I asked for prowess I get a flash that I must first construct a temple for my family deities!"

"My dear young man, I am happy to hear all that you have told. Now let me clarify point by point." Narayan Shenoy stated: "All that Mumbadevi wants you to do is, first construct a temple and then pray to your family deities for prowess and strength. As a guardian deity for the city as a whole, she will always grace and don't have any doubt about that. Then so far as the present rulers - my masters are concerned, they have long ago declared that they will not interfere in anyway in the religious matters and all of us have the fullest freedom. Therefore, time has come for hoisting our religious banner and let us not delay any longer. According to me Mumbadevi had certainly shown the way and showered her grace on you! There is no doubt about it!"

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7. THE GRACE OF GODDESS OF WEALTH

After this meeting in the temple of Mumbadevi, there was no occasion for Rama Kamati to meet Narayan Shenoy. Two months elapsed and then came the month of June and along with it, the thunder showers. As usual they brought Bombay under their sway, slackening the activities both in the sea and on the land.

This time the rains followed a different pattern. Sometime, they poured in torrents and torrents without any break or let up for a few days

making days dark, equal to nights and sometimes there would be no rains at all but sunshine and sunshine as bright as in the months of April and May. On some days dark clouds looking as heavy as iron would suddenly crash down as a rain-fall and within the next few moments, the bright sun would suddenly become visible with white clouds hanging around looking like hills made up of feathers. But the sea would remain rough, the low lying areas with rain water would look like lakes and with the grass sprouting everywhere, Bombay Green would look greener than ever.

Bombay Bazar at this time of the year would normally prepare for hybernation. But this year on 27th of June at noon all of a sudden though there were rains, traders and merchants with umbrellas in hands came to the streets and started shouting: "Beware of counterfeit gold coins. Beware! Some cheats have put into circulation gold-plated silver coins looking exactly like genuine gold coins. Please beware!" Like a wild fire, the news spread throughout Bombay and people refused to accept not only gold coins but also all other token coins made of silver and copper. With this all monetary transactions in the city came to a stand still. The sensation caused by the counterfeit currency created so much of heat that it had outbeaten the chilliness the rains had brought about and within an hour or two quite a few people had nervous breakdown with a fear that their hoarded wealth might be consisting of fake gold coins. Without any immediate solution in sight, anxiety, curiosity and uncertainty dragged on and on till the night fell and the traders closed their shops without transacting any business after losing confidence in the money in the form of coins issued by the Treasury of the Government of the East India Company.

The Administration headed by the Deputy Governor burnt mid-night oil working full night and the next day in the morning in every lane and by-lane of streets there was an official announcement with the beating of tom-tom that four shroffs found guilty of putting fake coins in circulation were already arrested and that the Government had taken stern steps to prevent recurrence of such mischief in future. Therefore, all the citizens were requested to carry on the financial transactions as usual. Even with this reassurance by the authorities, trade and commerce could not resume quickly.

On the third day-

In the morning Narayan Shenoy paid an unscheduled visit to Rama Kamati's office. Although a bit surprised at the unexpected visit, Rama Kamati, on seeing him enter, stood up, clasped his hands and smiling heartily greeted: "Shenoy uncle, welcome! Please come in."

Narayan Shenoy reciprocated by a broad grin and affectionately asked, "Rama dear, how are you?"

"I am fine, thank you!" He answered and in the next instant enquired, meaningfully, "By the by, tell me, Shenoy uncle, how are you and how are your masters?"

"I am fine!" He acknowledged. Then winking his eyes, he said, "My masters, too! After all, those who handled fake coins, they are brought to books. I was just worried about you."

"Worried about me?" Rama Kamati was surprised: "But, why?" He was eager to know.

"The world knows that you too are a shroff." Narayan Shenoy slowly explained: "And everybody knows that you exchange money. Per chance you too might have come into possession of those counterfeit coins."

Rama Kamati heartily laughed for a while and then hastened to add: "Shenoy uncle, no doubt I am in the business of exchange of money at a profit, I believe only in making a reasonable profit and not profiteering by foul means. To tell you frankly even if you offer the heaven, I will never part with my integrity. I don't want to grow rich by resorting to short-cut methods. If God grants, I will gladly accept and if He doesn't, I shall never regret. After all, by cheating people, how long can one live comfortably?"

With rapt attention Narayan Shenoy heard each and every word and then with great satisfaction, smiled: "Rama, I am fully convinced of your honesty and integrity. I did not have even the slightest doubt or suspicion. All that I felt was during the course of your business some fake 'pagodas' might have landed here without your knowldge!"

Rama Kamati felt that the elderly diplomat must have expressed anxiety sheerly out of concern for him. Therefore he thought of clarifying:

"Uncle, in this city none can beat Rama Kamati in the art of distinguishing good coins from the bad ones. Therefore, nobody would be courageous enough to approach me with fake coins."

"Good! I am glad to hear that!" Appreciated Narayan Shenoy. Then looking round and observing that some clerks were working in the office, he said, "I have something important to tell you. Can we go to your house?"

Rama Kamati readily agreed and both of them left the office instantly, got down the stairs quickly and took the pathway leading to the residence in the rearside of the building. They climbed the stairs and after reaching the main entrance Rama Kamati knocked at the door.

The door was opened not by the servant but by his wife holding the baby in her left arm. As soon as she saw Narayan Shenoy, she smiled brightly and said musically, "Oh, Shenoy uncle! Welcome! Hearty Welcome! Please come in."

Both of them entered and Narayan Shenoy smiled at her. Rama Kamati offered a seat and after sitting down, Narayan Shenoy looking at her said, "It is ages since I saw you!" Then he joked, "May be at the time of your wedding as a bride!"

Without reacting, she simply smiled, bowing down her head for a while. "Did you say a bride?" Rama Kamati laughed: "She always looks like a young bride. Beautiful and charming".....

She raised her head and pretending to be angry threw a sharp glance at her husband mischievously. When they were exchanging the glances like that, Narayan Shenoy looked at both of them and felt she was pretty and he was equally handsome. Really a beautiful couple, thought he. As she was still standing when they were sitting, Narayan Shenoy asked, "Why can't you sit down, daughter?" Obeying she mechanically sat down on a seat next to her husband, still holding the baby. Then she asked, "Shenoy uncle, how is aunt?"

"She is fine!" He replied detached....

"Last time," she recollected, "when I called on her to present the coconut offered at our Gouri puja she was complaining of some pain in the knees. Is she all right now?"

"What can I say, daughter?" He lamented. "She is like any other lady. First complain and then bear everything patiently not willing to take any medicine!"

"But my wife is not like that!" Rama Kamati had this to say as a joke: " She will not bear anything patiently. Even my love to her."

"Yes! Yes!" She pretended to be upset at his remark. In a complaining tone she said, "Shenoy uncle, do you know this great man who talks of love? He has no love for me. Yes! How can he have when he has two wives?"

"Really?" Narayan Shenoy was stunned.

"Yes!" She said dramatically as if it were true! "I am his second wife and inferior too!"

"Is it so?" To Narayan Shenoy it looked incredible.

Instantly with a smile she pointed to the wall where the shield and the swords were neatly kept. "Look, they are his first wife and I am the second!" She heartily laughed at her own joke. Hearing her words both Rama Kamati and Narayan Shenoy let loose a peal of laughter for a while. After this she stood up and said, "Jokes will do for the present. Now shall I get something to eat?"

"No thank you! Please be seated for a while." Narayan Shenoy requested, "I have come here on an important mission and let me not waste time." Saying like this, he started narrating with an air of seriousness: " The day before yesterday, Henry Walton, the Clerk of the Market who keeps a general watch on the operations in the market came to know that four of the shroffs in the city were cunningly exchanging the gold coins the so called pagodas with the counterfeit ones at a premium. They say, they were giving twelve new pagodas for ten old pagodas in exchange. Being alert in his duties Wanton found it well in time and reported to the authorities but inbetween it is learnt that more than two thousands fake pagodas were already exchanged. The Administration caught those four guilty shroffs red-handed and they are now behind the bars. A stern punishment awaits them and it appears they are going to be banished from the island. Now the authorities have laid down that if anyone wants to act as a shroff in the city of Bombay, he must get a valid licence from

the government by furnishing proper security. So you may have to apply for a licence".....

Hearing everything with rapt attention, Rama Kamati told, "Shenoy uncle, since the day before yesterday, I have decided to give up the profession of a shroff. So I don't need a licence!"

"Good!" said Narayan Shenoy. "You must have heard the announcement accompanied by the tom-tom by the government. They have assured the general public that no more frauds of this nature will recur again."

"Yes, I have heard!" Confirmed Rama Kamati: "But how will they do it?"

"Well, by appointing the most honest and capable shroff of Bombay, the great Rama Kamati as the Treasury Shroff!" Narayan Shenoy majestically and dramatically declared: "Your Majesty, I have come here to seek your permission for the appointment."

"What, me?" He stood up wondering: "Did you not get anybody else for this post?"

"What is wrong in it?" His wife interrupted, "It is an honour to all of us!"

"Laxmi, did you say this?" An astonished Rama Kamati asked, looking at her with a stare.

"When Laxmidevi, the very Goddess of Wealth from the heaven graces, who on the earth can stop it?" Narayan Shenoy with a gracious smile advised, "Rama dear, do not reject the offer that has come of its own. Please accept! I can assure that it will not cause you any harm!"

"But," Rama Kamati's face became red out of excitement. Then beads of perspiration appeared on his forehead. He wiped and said, " I wanted to become the commander, wield arms and fight battles but both of you ask me to sit in the Treasury and count the coins!" He was reluctant to accept the offer. Narayan Shenoy understood his feelings. He said in a cajoling tone: "Rama dear, after all what is the aim of your life? As I could understand, you want to serve Bombay and her people. Now take this to be a call from the same city whom you dearly love. Just think! People have lost faith and confidence in the currency. Trade is at

its lowest ebb which may ruin everybody and unless someone like you, known for integrity and honesty, sits in the Treasury and assures people that the coins are genuine, none will accept them. The Government solicits this small service from you!" He looked fixedly at Rama Kamati's face for his reaction. Rama Kamati thinking deeply remained silent. After sometime breaking the silence his wife said, "Shenoy uncle, there should be no second thoughts. You please convey to the authorities in the Government that he has accepted the offer. After all, when someone is in difficulty we have got to help....Now shall I get something to eat?"

"Yes, my daughter!" Narayan Shenoy fully appreciated her views: "Our households thrive only because our ladies are always by our side to tender us sound advice!"

"Yes! Yes!" Rama Kamati heartily laughed: "After all who can beat a seasoned diplomat? When you wanted Laxmi to be present during the discussions, I thought that to-day I will lose and you will win the battle!"

With a broad smile his wife went in to fetch the eatables. Continuing the conversation, Narayan Shenoy said apologetically, "Rama, there is nothing like a victory or a defeat in the matters like this. When your aim is to serve people, I thought that here is a good opportunity to do so. Please do not mistake me!"

"Oh, no! Never, Shenoy uncle!" Rama Kamati hastened to add, "Not at all. I know you are one of the well-wishers of our family from my father's time. I am certain you will not misguide me. All that I wanted was to become a warrior. But when Mumbadevi herself was lingering to ordain....."

His wife coming there holding the plates of snacks interrupted and completed the sentence: "When Mumbadevi was lingering, Laxmidevi wanted him to become the Treasury Shroff of Bombay."

Hearing her words with all seriousness, he said, "Yes! I will obey thy command!"

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8. THE TREASURY OF RAMA KAMATI

One day, when Rama Kamati was in the treasury, a party of priests from Mahim went to meet him at the treasury.

Upon their arrival, an attendant went to his chamber and announced the arrival : "Sir, some priests from Mahim have come. They want to meet you!"

"Call them!" He ordered.

As they entered, he stood up, joined his palms as a mark of respect and requested them to be seated.

Not willing to sit, they asked, "Are you Mr Rama Kamati?"

"Yes!" He replied as respectfully as he could, "Tell me what can I do for you!"

"Oh, you can do a lot for us!" They smiled meaningfully : "We are planning to construct a temple in Mahim by raising donations!"

"Good idea!" He appreciated : "Tell me, what do you expect from me!"

"What else?" They said, "You own the treasury the very abode of the Goddess of Wealth. If not a flower, give us at least a petal. The temple will be dedicated to the Mother Goddess Sitaladevi and she will bless you!"

"I am happy to hear that!" Rama Kamati added, "But your impression that I own the treasury is not right. This belongs to the government and I am only a servant."

They looked at each other and the senior-most among them taking the lead revealed, " The whole of Bombay calls this as Rama Kamati's Treasury and we freely exchange coins only because they are from Rama Kamati's Treasury."

Rama Kamati was aware of this fact and as he did not want to drag on the discussion further he said,"Venerable ones, it is time for taking lunch here and we have a break now. Shall we go home and take food?" He cordially invited.

"We can do that!" They readily agreed: "But what about the donation for which we have come?"

"This is an office!" Rama Kamati politely pointed out: "Here we talk only about the official matters. Religion is a personal matter and so we shall discuss it at home! I hope you people will not mind!"

They appreciated his views and agreed to discuss at his residence.

Rama Kamati took them home.

In a short time Mrs Kamati got the food ready for the guests.

Meal over, they were requested to be seated in the hall. But instead of chairs, they preferred to squat on the mats of grass and so the grass mats were spread out specially for them. Rama Kamati as a mark of respect sat squatting in front of them. Thus making them comfortable, he asked, "Presently is there any place of worship in Mahim?"

"Place of worship, 'Yes!' but for us 'No!' They replied in chorus: "There is a masjid and there is a church but so far there is no temple!"

"Why?" Rama Kamati eagerly asked, "Why there is no temple?"

"Who is there to construct it?" They asked. "During the reign of the Muslim kings, they constructed a masjid and later on during the rule of Portuguese they constructed a church." Rama Kamati thought for a while bowing down his head and thereafter enquired, "Then, over centuries is there no temple at all?"

"We learn there was a temple!" The senior-most priest explained, "Some three centuries ago, when Bombay was ruled by a Hindu king called Nagardev he had constructed a temple. It was dedicated to the Mother Goddess, Sitaladevi. Mahim was then known as Mahikavati and that was his capital."

"Then what happened to that temple?" Rama Kamati was eager to know.

"Well, one day when Nagardev had gone to Walukeshwar temple, the Sultan of Gujarat secretly waiting for an opportunity, invaded Mahikavati like a flash of lightning. "The priest stopped the narration for a while and looked up at Mrs Kamati who, standing in a corner was attentively listening to the story.

"Then what happened?" Rama Kamati's curiosity grew.

"The king was away but in the palace was the queen, brave and young and daring and adventurous. Undaunted by the tidings of the siege, she instantly wore the armour, drew the sword..."

On hearing, at once Rama Kamati stood up, excited. His eyes shone, hands trembled and heart increased the beatings being eager to hear more about the queen's heroism. He asked out of curiosity, "Did the queen carry the shield or only the sword?"

As though he had personally witnessed the preparation by the queen, the priest dramatically described, "Yes! She took both the shield and the sword. Then in a moment's time, she got hundreds of warriors ready. Being well versed in wielding arms and organising the troops she called for the royal horse. Sitting comfortably on the horseback she valiantly led the army to the battlefield!"

"What a brave queen!" Rama Kamati, still standing, exclaimed, "Bombay should always be proud of that great queen!"

The priest continued the tale of valour: "Yes! But unfortunately the Muslim soldiers outnumbering the warriors of Mahikavati,before long gained an upperhand. And alas, the queen was killed in the combat!"

"Oh, no!" Rama Kamati not willing to hear her defeat, sadly exclaimed: "What a pity! The enemy must have stealthily hit her from her back! Otherwise how could such a brave queen be killed?"

The priest continued to narrate, detached: "Very soon the king came to know about the tragedy. However it was not the time to sit and mourn as the enemy had already ransacked his capital. With the available men he rushed back from Walukeshwar and a fierce battle ensued in Byculla. The king fought valiantly but before long he too lost his life in the battlefield. With this, Hindus lost Bombay for ever!" Hearing the story Rama Kamati sat down with a deep sigh knowing not what to say. "The temple at Mahim was destroyed at the fall of Mahikavati and since then there is no temple!" The priest concluding the narration reminded: "We therefore want to construct a temple and came to the city the day before yesterday to raise donations. We would like to return today before the high tide in the evening. We once again appeal to

donate your mite for the noble cause."

Rama Kamati, stood up and looked at his wife meaningfully. She understood the message, nodded her head and went in. Instantly he followed her and within the next few moments he came back and asked, "Did you contact others in the Bazar?"

"Yes!" Rather disappointed they replied, "We did."

"How much could you collect?" He wanted to know.

"Altogether twenty seven gold coins." They answered, frustrated.

"Only twenty seven pagodas? Strange!" He asked rather astonished.

They nodded their heads to say "Yes!"

He then went in and came back with a money-bag fully swollen. His wife followed him. Standing before the priests, he enquired, "Whom shall I give this to?"

The senior-most priest who had narrated the story of Mahikavati stood up.

Rama Kamati with all humility and modesty handed over the bag devoutly with both of his hands and after giving, clasped his hands and revealed: "Altogether in this bag there are one hundred and one gold pagodas. I think with this you can construct a shrine for the Mother Goddess Sitaladevi. If there is a shortfall, do not hesitate to send words to me. In God's kingdom nothing is scarce!"

His words brightened up their face, cheered their spirit, cleared their throat and all of them chanted melodiously some benedictory mantras blessing the family.

When they rose to go, both Rama Kamati and his wife touched their feet. Blessing profusely they left.

Rama Kamati followed them up to the gate and then returned, recollecting again and again the valour of the queen, heroism of the king and the tragic fall of Mahikavati. He entered the hall, sat on his usual seat and sighed deeply.

As there was nobody in the hall his wife came close, stroked his hair and lovingly reminded in a musical tone: "Lunch time is up

and don't you have to go back to the treasury?"

"What treasury?" He said dejected, "My monthly salary is barely rupees twenty and everbody in Bombay believes that I am the owner of the treasury. On the top of it they call it Rama Kamati's Treasury!"

"Yes, I know!" She smiled. "It is a thankless job. But at the same time it is a rare honour and that way every thing cannot be measured in terms of money."

"How did you like the story the priest had narrated?" He deliberately asked as it was still lingering in his mind.

She understood his feelings. She took his palm into hers, clasped and affectionately asked, "Do you know how were you looking when the priest narrated that the queen was killed in the combat?"

"How?" He looked deep into her eyes.

"You stood excitedly as though you would be able to rush through the corridor of time to reach Mahikavati to be in command of troops to take revenge of the defeat!"

His eyes twinkled, breath deepened and face became red with excitement.

"What you saw was right!" He accepted openly. She smiled graciously and said softly, "You know at that time I had an intuition that one day you will command a huge army! But, for the present." She paused for a while.

"What is that for the present?" Greatly encouraged he enquired out of curiosity.

"You will run the same Rama Kamati's Treasury." Telling like this she heartily laughed bringing him back to the real world reminding him of his duties.

"Yes! Yes!" Hurriedly he stood up: "Time is up and let me go!" Then he remembered something and said, "The priests have done a good service asking for a donation for the temple. Long time ago I had thought of erecting a temple for my family deities but I had totally forgotten. Now time has come to act. Let me do it without further loss of time."

And he did it. Thus a temple came into existence in Bombay Bazar.

9.THE CANNONS BOOMED

The year was 1689;

Month was February;

And the date was the Fourteenth.

At one o'clock that night all of a sudden the cannon in the Castle of Bombay boomed thrice sending across the city the deafening waves signalling the danger of a probable invasion.

Although it was the dead of night and the people were fast asleep, the alarm was strong enough to awaken them to stir out of their beds. Then leaving their homes in throngs, under the moonlit sky caring little for their dress they ran to the Castle anxious to know what the matter was.

They ran and they reached but as if unconcerned the huge gates of the Castle were tightly closed without anybody in waiting. They peeped in, but inside everything was dark and silent without any sign of life! Within the walls of the Castle not a single leaf on the trees did stir, not a faint ray of lamp was visible and not even a single watch dog did bark!

The deadly silence was unbearable. Yet people not willing to go back without knowing the exact reason, squatted in front of the Castle gates waiting for some tiding or an official announcement regarding the danger that had befallen on the city.

Here at Rama Kamati's:

He got up as soon as he had heard the first shot and when he heard the second and the third ones it became clear that Bombay was invaded. His wife, children and servants all were awakened and were frightened at the deafening sound of the cannon. Instantly lights were lit and all of them were anxious to know what the matter was.

Rama Kamati did not utter a single word. He was aware that the war clouds were hanging on the horizon of Bombay. Siddis were preparing for an invasion. But strangely the people and the Government of Bombay had made no preparations to meet the challenge! And perhaps now the enemy was standing at the doorsteps.

He stood up and looked at his wife. Clearing her throat she asked anxiously: "What's the matter?"

"Three shots from the cannon," explained Rama Kamati, "indicate an attack by an enemy. Bombay must have been invaded!"

"Really?" she was terribly frightened.

"Give me my shirt." He calmly asked as if nothing had happened: "I would like to go out and see for myself what the matter is!"

Obeying,mechanically she brought his shirt, anxiety still writ large on face.

He put on hurriedly, went out to the hall swiftly and stood there silently for a while gazing at the swords and the shield on the wall.

Then with an urge to draw the sword he went close, touched but suddenly changed his mind and retraced his steps. He looked back and his wife was keenly watching him all the while.

He smiled at her and said, "I shall go to the Castle and see for myself what the matter is. I shall return after sometime and in the meantime take care of everything. I think there should be no reason for anxiety or fear!" Saying so without waiting for her answer he opened the door, stepped out and went to the stable at the rear side of the house. He opened the door and led his favourite horse out. Within the next few minutes he got it ready for a ride. Then he looked round and up at the sky. The moon had already crossed the midnight sky and in the soft and silvery moon light, things were visible but looking pale and dim. Without losing much time he sat on the back of horse and patted on its sides. The horse started trotting.

He allowed it to trot and as usual, the horse went straight to the temple of Lord Venkataramana. The doors of the temple were closed but he got down from the horse, walked upto the doors, bowed before the closed doors and sought benedictions from the deities inside the shrine.

After that he mounted and sat comfortably on the back of the horse and thought of going to the Castle. But suddenly he had an after-thought and changed the direction and took the street leading to the highway that could take him directly to Mazgaon.

There was none on the street and it was wearing a deserted look. The atmosphere was cool and calm and so under the moonlit sky the horse galloped at a great speed as though it was flying.

In Mazgaon, Sewree and Mahim, Rama Kamati had coconut gardens and paddy fields which were being looked after by his servants and tenants. On the horseback once a week he used to pay visits to the gardens and so the highway to Mazgaon was familiar not only to him but also to the horse. All these days he was travelling during day-time but today after midnight - an unusual time.

The moon was slowly moving westward in the sky and across the highway, the long shadows cast by the trees on the sidewalks presented a rare but aweful sight. But caring little for everything he sped away.

The highway was empty. There were no bullock carts, no horse drawn carriages and no traveller on horse back and he was the lone traveller and the sound of the hoofs of his horse was the only sound that he could hear at that hour of the night. Like this the journey continued.

When he was nearing Mazgaon, all of a sudden, he could hear dogs bark, people shout and shriek and wheels rattle on the rut covered road indicating hurried movement of people for safety by available means of conveyance. Instead of going to the town, he preferred to take a diversion and go to the curved seashore to catch the glimpse of the Castle of Bombay on the right-hand side and Sewree on the left hand side. The sea-shore of Mazgaon was providing the views of both the Castle of Bombay and that of Sewree, though they were miles apart.

Rama Kamati wanted to have a view of Sewree, as in the past also Siddi had landed in Sewree twice or thrice as if that area solely belonged to him.

As soon as he reached the sea-shore his attention was attracted by the glare of huge flames going very high in the sky and in the brightness of the bonfire he could watch people running helter skelter for protection. In the stillness of the night shrieks could be heard even from a distance and the blaze reflecting on the sea had made water look like molten iron.

Rama Kamati, still on the horse back, not stirring even by an inch

sat like a statue watching the bonfire. "Surely this must be the handiwork of Siddi's men." He bit his lips in anguish. They must have brutally burnt at least a couple of hundred huts to announce their successful landing. What a pity ! Are there no Bombay troops in Sewree to resist, repel or beat these savages back ? It is really disgraceful!"

Lost in thoughts like this, as he sat motionless forgetting everything, to draw his attention, the horse shook its head and softly neighed.

"Oh, yes!" He patted. "I had forgotten the purpose for which I have come here!" Saying so, he turned his face towards the right- hand side to have a glimpse of the Castle. From a distance, in the dim moon-light, the Castle was looking lifeless and frozen and it appeared that there was a deliberate blackout to keep out of the gaze of the invaders.

But when the Siddis knew every inch of the land of Bombay islands why this timidity, felt he. The flames of fire in Sewree did not seem to die out soon. Therefore he thought of returning and so he turned the horse back and moved towards the town of Mazgaon. When he reached, most of the inhabitants were on the streets. They had already left their homes and were getting ready to flee carrying whatever was possible.

He stopped a few inhabitants and asked what the matter was. They looked up at him suspiciously but when he informed that he was from Bombay Bazar they hurriedly told, "Siddi Yakut Khan has landed at Sewree with hundreds of troops and has already started plundering and looting mercilessly. Any moment he might arrive here. Therefore we are leaving this place for safety."

"Where do you go now at this hour of the night?" Feeling greatly concerned, he asked.

"Where else can we go?" They expressed their helplessness. "We are going to Worli. If we start now, perhaps by morning we shall reach."

"Instead of Worli why can't you go to the city?" Unintentionally he asked.

"City?" They laughed : "The enemy's target is always the city and the Castle. Why should we go directly into the trap when Worli is safer? Hills and creeks and thick banyan trees of Worli provide a natural shield. No troops can enter easily." With these words they left, without waiting

for his reaction or reply.

Now Rama Kamati got all the information he wanted. Siddi Yakut Khan had invaded Bombay with a huge army. He had already started looting and plundering by burning down the huts of the poor in Sewree and the people of Mazgaon had started fleeing for safety. The rulers in the Bombay Castle without even a faint ray of candle visible had not yet made up their mind to beat back the invaders.

Without wasting time he turned the horse in the direction of the city and galloped.

The moon was almost setting when he reached the outskirts of the Castle. From a distance he could see the milling crowds outside the Castle still waiting for the gates to open. But as he did not wish to go close to the Castle taking a diversion he took the path leading to the temple of Mumbadevi.

As soon as he reached the temple square he got down from the horse and walked up to the entrance. The doors were closed and there was none in the vicinity but he could see the faint rays of a lamp burning inside the shrine through the carved holes on the door. He peeped in to behold and lo! Though the rays were faint he could clearly see Mumbadevi. Her eyes wide open and face bright red with the gold crown on head and the sharp trident her favourite weapon was shining brightly even in the dim light of the lamp as though to reassure protection to Bombay and her people for ever.

He joined his palms in salutation and reverentially prayed, "Mother, do you know your Bombay is under attack by Siddi Yakut Khan? The fire of invasion has started in Sewree and any moment it may spread to other parts. I know you do not need protection of any kind. But we need your protection. As it looks just now, the rulers are timid and we do not know how to save ourselves. You know very well that I was coming to your feet everyday to seek your benedictions and grace for prowess. But you hesitated to grant me anything. As ordained by you I erected a temple for Lord Venkataramana but he is also as silent as you are! I have a sword and I have the courage but I do not have the sanction from either of you to wield the sword. Time has come now to help people. Tell me, whether or not I should do it!" He closed his eyes and meditated

for a while. When he opened his eyes and sought an answer looking fixedly at the deity, strangely the lamp that was burning lazily all the while started throwing more light and in that increasing brightness the countenance of Mumbadevi looked more and more brilliant and finally looked more graceful than the rising sun. In the next few moments her eyes shone brightly like stars and now the Mother Goddess looked as though she would like to speak to him like a mother to her son. He bowed his head with utmost devotion and prayed, "Mother, I am waiting for your command.."...

As soon as he whispered his prayer there was an echo at the bottom of his heart : "Child, don't hesitate! Wield your sword and I am with you!"

"Mother, did you say this?" It was such a thrilling and incredible experience that Rama Kamati could not believe it! He gazed at the idol but in a moment's time the brilliance and the brightness were already gone. As if nothing had happened the same oil lamp continued to burn faintly.His life long ambition to wield the sword, yes, Mumbadevi had granted the permission at last. Now what more did he need in life? With a light heart he came back to where the horse was standing and he mechanically mounted. The horse started trotting, again waiting for the master's signal to gallop and within the next few minutes he was back at his residence.

Not going to bed again, all the while, his wife and children, being anxious were waiting for his safe arrival. As soon as she saw, his wife offered a silent thanksgiving prayer to Lord Venkataramana, heaved a sigh of relief and eagerly enquired, "Where did you go? We were all terribly worried and because you did not return in time, I had to send the servants to the Castle. They searched for you everywhere and came back emptyhanded." Her throat choked.

"Then," He asked, "what happened?"

"What will happen?" She cleared her throat, gained confidence and told : "The authorities had fired three shots, alerted the people and then quietly slept."

"Really?" He pretended as if he knew nothing!

"Then what?" She looked disgusted : "Crowd after crowd of men and women both English and the native went to the Castle to enquire what the matter was. But who is there to give an answer? Gates were tightly closed and they say not a single soul was inside. Now tell me frankly where did you go!"

Rama Kamati slowly explained, "I went to our temple first. Then from there to Mazgaon. In Mazgaon I went to the sea-shore from where I saw Sewree in flames."

"Flames?" With a shrill voice she asked unbelieving and in the next instant she became dumbfounded.

"Yes - Siddi Yakut Khan has invaded Bombay. His troops in thousands have landed in Sewree. It appears the troops have started their raids." Before he could conclude, she interrupted, "Then what will happen to our orchards and gardens in Sewree and Mazgaon?"

"I can't say!" He murmured because all the while, being a broadminded person he was thinking of the fate of Bombay instead of his own! It had never occured to him that he had large estates in those parts of Bombay where the invasion had actually taken place. Taking everything lightly he consoled her : "Why do you think of our property alone? Whatever happens to others will happen to us also. When there is a danger to Bombay as a whole why should we selfishly think of our own things? Now let me continue my narration : I saw people in Mazgaon fleeing. Most of them were going to Worli. I heard them say that the Castle and the city could be the ultimate targets of the invaders."

"Oh, no!" Not willing to accept the reality, his wife lamented : "Then where can we take shelter?"

"There should not be any cause for anxiety or worry!" The gallant Rama Kamati went close to the wall where his swords and the shield were kept and with a twinkle of the eye, he swiftly drew out both the swords with both of his arms and held them high. Then to everybody's amazement, his wife, sons and servants he announced, "After watching everything, I went to Mumbadevi's temple and there." He stopped for a while to draw everybody's attention.

Everyone stood speechless eager to know what had happened at the temple.

"Well," He continued with an emotional tone, "there was none in the temple. Not even the priest. You know there are holes carved in the main door to enable the devotees to have a look of the deity when the temple is closed and so I could see Mumbadevi through the holes in the glow of a lamp burning steadily in front of the idol."

They did not find anything interesting in the story. However his wife was still listening to him with rapt attention.

Rama Kamati continued to narrate remembering the thrilling experience he had at the temple : "I offered prayers to Mumbadevi and as our army is smaller than Siddi's I sought her grace, protection and permission to wield my sword." After a moment's pause he concluded : "And Mumbadevi, pleased with my prayers granted all that I had craved for." With these words he kept the swords back in their place and looked meaningfully at his wife.

Then he wanted to tell something. But before he could open his mouth, all of them heard a cock crowing from a distance suggesting that the dawn was at hand. Hearing that, he asked his wife, "Will you please get ready warm water for me? I will have my morning bath and go to the Castle, to get to know the latest position."

Although in the grip of anxiety, fear and uncertainty, she mechanically nodded her head and went in deeply engrossed in thoughts and worries about the unknown future in the wake of Siddi's invasion.

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10. THE GUN AS A GIFT

At dawn, carrying the sword, Rama Kamati joined the crowd waiting at the gate of the Castle since midnight. Although he had the knowledge of Siddi's invasion he kept the secret for himself and pretended as if he knew nothing. When somebody enquired, why did he carry the sword he laughed and said that after hearing the shots fired by the cannons sounding alarm he thought it fit to carry for self-defence knowing not what danger awaited him on the way.

At sun-rise, like the flood gates, the heavy gates of the Castle were finally opened by the guards carrying the loaded guns. As soon as the gates were opened the eager crowds clapping their hands, shouted "Hey!" as if they got what they wanted knowing not the seriousness of the situation.

Now the government spokesman in red uniform appeared on the scene accompanied by a man with a tom-tom hung from his neck. The tom-tom was beaten heavily for a while to draw the attention of the crowd and to remain quiet. The crowds responded, stopped talking and at once there was a silence all over. As soon as the beating of the drum stopped, the spokesman, read out very loudly :

"Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Honourable Government regrets to announce that Siddi Yakut Khan of Janjira has invaded Bombay at midnight yesterday. His troops have landed in Sewree in large numbers and the Honourable Government is taking all possible steps with utmost care to repel the enemy. At the same time, it also solicits the help and support of all the citizens, by way of men, material and money so that a united front can be formed to drive the enemy away as expeditiously as possible. In the meantime, all the citizens are advised to make arrangements to take care of their personal property in their own way." The announcement ended with the beating of the tom-tom and immediately thereafter the gates were securely closed with the guards keeping a close watch from inside.

The people who were patiently and anxiously waiting for about six long hours to know what the matter was, suddenly felt panicky and insecure on hearing the news of invasion by Siddi Yakut Khan. Although the Siddis were raiding Bombay at regular intervals, never before the gates of the Castle were closed nor had the Government remained tight-lipped for six long hours.

Similarly in the past no advice was tendered to the citizens to make their own arrangements to safeguard their property. Evidently something deeper and more serious must have taken place than the mere word 'invasion', felt the people as they left the place in a great hurry.

People left hastily in throngs just as they had come hastily and

Rama Kamati watched them go, standing slightly away from the gates. To him it looked like a great fun as if the birds in panic would swiftly fly away from a tree on hearing a loud bang even though coming from a distance. At last when everybody was gone and the place was deserted, Rama Kamati saw a person with a black cap standing firmly near the main gate. Who could this person be? His curiosity was aroused and to find out he went closer. Hearing the foot steps, the stranger looked back and exclaimed, "Oh, Mr. Rama Kamati, I presume!"

As he was a stranger to Rama Kamati, he surveyed quickly but being unable to recognise he cleared his throat and said, "Yes, I am Rama Kamati. But may I know your name? Sorry! I am unable to recognise."

The stranger smiled : "My name is Rustom Dorabji and I am a Parsi."

"Mr. Dorabji?" Rama Kamati heartily smiled and gaily shook his hands. I have heard about your name and fame. That way in Bombay who does not know your name Mr. Dorabji? But I did not have any occasion to meet you so far. Better late than never. At least now I could meet you!"

Dorabji grinned : "But I have seen you, Mr. Kamati. Of course from a distance. To repeat your words, 'Who in Bombay does not know Mr. Rama Kamati and his Treasury? Well, now let me come to the point. Have you heard the announcement made just now?" Rama Kamati, with all seriousness nodded his head affirmatively.

"What can I - the Treasury Shroff who counts and inspects the coins think of except the jingle of money?" He discreetly answered.

"You are right!" The shrewd Parsi gentleman could follow that Rama Kamati was not eager to discuss publicly such a sensitive subject, that too in front of the gates of the Castle - the very seat of power.

Rama Kamati was glad that Dorabji could understand his hesitation. He asked, "Mr. Dorabji, tell me frankly when everybody is gone, what should we wait here for?"

Dorabji became thoughtful for a while. Then he slowly said, "The situation is really grim. Therefore, let us not leave everything to the government. In the hour of crisis like this, all must join together and

fight out."

"You are right." Rama Kamati agreed. "Here is my sword and here I am ready to do anything to save Bombay!"

"Good!" The seasoned Parsi gentleman patted on his back and complimented. "I knew for certain that you can speak on subjects other than the jingle of money also. But how can you alone save Bombay, gentleman? You have seen for yourself just now how people arrived here running and how they returned running. Nobody had time to wait here and think. If all would join together no force on the earth could cause any harm."

Rama Kamati pondered over all that he had stated. "Yes!" thought he. "Why should the people leave immediately on hearing the news of invasion? Is it to protect the property and wealth individually instead of trying to save the city collectively? That way people cannot be blamed solely when nobody had elicited their support or asked them to join together and beat back the enemy. Well, in Bombay in such matters there is no leader worth the name who could make people rally round him to fight for a common cause. This could be the reason for the plight of the people."

Dorabji looked fixedly at Rama Kamati's face as though he could read clearly his thoughts. Then he said, "Ramji, at this moment of crisis, Bombay needs a leader like you who could unite people and fight for Bombay!"

Rama Kamati not expecting the compliments, at once exclaimed, "Me? Of all the citizens of Bombay, how could you think of me and me alone? How about you, sir?"

Dorabji heartily laughed. He took out his cap from his head, bowed and showed his grey hair looking like silver. "What do you think of me? I have crossed seventy. Yet I am willing to fight and die for Bombay. I have already raised a small battalion. But Ramji, believe me, I am not as popular as you are. To-day everyone accepts coins-copper, silver or gold only because they have the backing of the integrity and goodwill of Rama Kamati's, though thousands may not have seen Rama Kamati in person. With this goodwill, name and fame at your credit if you personally approach, perhaps you will be able to muster the wholehearted support

of everyone in Bombay. Before that we shall meet the Governor and enquire whether the Administration really needs the support of the people."

Rama Kamati agreed and they went to the gate and requested one of the guards to go in and seek the Governor's permission to meet.

The Governor was pleased to grant the permission and the guards hurriedly opened the gates of the Castle and let them in. Then they were led to the chamber of the Governor where they could see him seated on a high chair with body-guards on either side. The Governor was looking pale and serious and terribly worried.

"Good-morning, Your Excellency!" Dorabji and Rama Kamati both introduced themselves and bowed their heads as a mark of respect.

"Good-morning!" The Governor Sir John Child wished back but without any warmth.

"Your Excellency," Dorabji respectfully said, "just now we have heard the news of invasion by Siddi Yakut Khan and therefore we have come forward on behalf of the citizens of Bombay to assure you all help. Please let us know whether we can be of any service."

Hearing his words, the Governor's face that was looking dull and depressed suddenly started brightening up and at once he acknowledged: "I am really glad. The government has at its command money and materials, wealth and weapons. But we don't have man-power. All that we need now is men - men of character, strength and courage to fight on our side and beat back the invaders."

"Your Excellency need not worry about men." Dorabji reassured. "I have a band of three hundred men ready to obey any command. I shall place my men at the disposal of the government."

The Governor faintly smiled : "What can we do with such a small number? Do you know the enemy's strength? It is estimated to be twenty five thousand and still they are pouring in!" After a while he revealed in a low tone : "Our army consists of barely two thousand five hundred soldiers." It was a revelation to both Dorabji and Rama Kamati.

On hearing that the Bombay army was very small in comparison to Siddi's they were stunned. Then, any moment Siddi Yakut Khan could

march fearlessly, over-power this small army and capture Bombay city very easily, they concluded. Well, his victory march meant rape, plunder, looting and large scale destruction of every thing he could lay his hands on. Within a few hours of his victory he could set Bombay on fire, as done in Sewree and leave it as a heap of ruins. This should be stopped at all costs, thought Rama Kamati.

The Governor looking helpless continued to state in a serious tone, "All that I need immediately is at least five thousand men strong enough to defend the gates of the city. We have weapons and we can train any number of people overnight. But who can procure them within two to three days time? We can even pay an attractive salary to all the sepoys engaged by us and I promise that once the war is over anybody who procures men for us will always receive our honour and help in return ."

As soon as he announced like this Rama Kamati at once raised his hand as though he had accepted the challenge and declared : "Your Excellency, I will do it and please leave that worry to me!" On hearing his words both the Governor and Dorabji looked admiringly at Rama Kamati, feeling greatly relieved.

Seizing the opportunity to praise, Dorabji had this to say : "Your Excellency, Rama Kamati can help us a lot. He is held in high esteem by people of all walks in Bombay and more so by Hindus."

"I know! I know!" The Governor also appreciated : "People believe that the Treasury belongs to Mr. Kamati instead of the government. I have heard you have erected a temple in the Bazar. Am I right, Mr. Kamati?"

"Yes, Your Excellency!" Rama Kamati nodded his head with all humility: "Of course with the assistance of God only."

"I also learn that you are an ardent devotee of Goddess Mumbadevi."

"That is right, Your Excellency."

"Then you may not find the job difficult, Mr. Kamati." The Governor hoped : "Pray to the Goddess on our behalf also for the safety of the city."

Rama Kamati wanted to disclose that he had already done it but

somehow his tongue was unwilling to form words. The Governor stood up, thought of something and looked back. There was a gun kept hanging on the wall. He took and proffered it to Rama Kamati : "Mr. Kamati, here you are. Take this as a gift from the Governor. You can drop in and meet me anytime. Hereafterwards nobody shall stop you from entering the Castle or my office. Please help us by procuring five thousand strong men immediately."

Bowing down his head as a mark of respect, Rama Kamati received the gun with both of his arms. He spoke not a word but brightly shone his eyes to express the thrill and the joy he had in his heart.

The gun came and with the gun came to him the tremendous responsibility of defending the gates of the city of Bombay.

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11. CRUSHING DEFEAT

As they came out of the gates of the Castle, Dorabji profusely congratulated Rama Kamati for volunteering to procure men to defend Bombay. From his side he assured all help and support. He also told in unequivocal terms that at the hour of crisis a person of Rama Kamati's status and stature alone could infuse and instill confidence and courage in the minds of the people, who were feeling insecure. He was called upon to do such a feat a decade ago when Bombay was in the grip of the serious monetary crisis with the fake coins in circulation and now a greater opportunity had come to prove his capabilities. In reply Rama Kamati hoped that God would give him enough strength to shoulder the additional and tremendous responsibility of mobilising and training people for an effective counter-attack to beat back the enemy. The Siddis used to visit Bombay, under the pretext of taking shelter during the monsoons and at that time also they were creating enough tension by raping women, looting people, burning down houses and while leaving Bombay take some people as their slaves but this time they had landed not during the monsoon but at the beginning of the spring, with a clear intention of invading Bombay as a step of retaliation and this was known to every-

one including Rama Kamati. Yes, the English had erred in confiscating a fleet of ships belonging to Siddis simply on a rumour that they were preparing for an invasion of Bombay and inspite of their repeated requests, the English had refused to release the ships and the goods. After exhausting all their patience Siddis finally landed in Bombay although they made no secret of their plans to invade. But the English took everything lightly and made no preparations at all to meet the threat.

By the by who were these Siddis? About them, when Rama Kamati had enquired, once Narayan Shenoy, now retired from active service, had this to say : To the south of Bombay, some twenty six miles away lay Janjirá, a small state that happened to be the home of Siddis. Though it was a state the name often referred to a fort built on the island in which lived Siddis a small but enterprising Mohammedan community that hailed some two hundred years ago from Abyssinia, an African country. They came to India as traders but soon gained a foothold sheerly out of their physical strength and seafaring nature. There was an interesting legend about them, according to which Siddis landed in Janjira in a dramatic way. One of them, dressed like a trader carrying some presents and gifts, landed in Janjira with a ship and sought the permission of the local chief to land three hundred huge and heavy wooden boxes representing that they contained valuable merchandise. Impressed by the presents, with least suspicion, the local chief readily gave permission.

At the fall of night instead of merchandise, from each box emerged a fully armed Abyssinian soldier ! Without any difficulty they overpowered the local chief and his men and came in possession of the island and the fort of Janjira.

Although the legend gave interesting details, after all it was a legend and a legend always meant imagination. Yet the fact remained that having crossed the sea, they come here as traders, to conduct business and earn a profit. But not believing in the slow process of business or agriculture on the land, they took to rowing and rocking the boats in the sea. The island of Janjira provided every opportunity to this brave band of seafaring people to build ships and vessels and make use of them to serve their needs, ambitions and aspirations. Ultimately their knack in fighting on the sea was recognised by the Moghul Emperors. They appointed the Siddi Chiefs as the admirals of the Moghul Naval

force to look after their interest in the Western Sea.

During his lifetime, Shivaji Raje tried his best to conquer the Siddis and capture the fort and the island of Janjira but all his efforts were systematically foiled by the Siddis who ultimately remained unbeaten in the sea around Bombay as well as Konkan. For the same reason they became daring and dashing and caring little for the English or their naval forces Siddis used to visit Bombay during rainy season to winter their fleet in Sewree, sometimes obtaining permission and sometimes without it as though Bombay was their second home. When they used to come during monsoon they would behave like the hordes of wild elephants crushing and destroying everything on their way. They had struck such a terror in the heart that even in a dream the people of Bombay would sweat by hearing the very word, 'Siddi' and now, here were the same Siddis on the threshold of the city of Bombay, posing the biggest ever threat.

Thinking like this when Rama Kamati reached his home,some more horrible news was waiting for him. Some of his tenants and servants from Mazgaon and Mahim were anxiously waiting for his arrival. As soon as they saw, they surrounded him and hurriedly reported : "Master, things have turned from bad to worse. Siddi's men have captured the Fort of Mazgaon and the English troops have deserted the Fort leaving behind chests of treasure, arms, ammunition, cannons and guns. Emboldend by the timidity of the English, Siddi Yakut Khan has sent some of his troops to Mahim who, with least difficulty, have taken possession of the fort at Mahim and hoisted their flag. As if they are not content with the easy victory, the troops are now engaged in looting and plunder and the people in both these places have started fleeing to safer places to save their life. We have come all the way to report what has happened and what is happening now!"

Rama Kamati stood speechless for a while, unbelieving. How could Siddi's men attack and bring under their control two of the strongest bastions of Bombay? If the fort of Mazgaon had fallen into their hands could the Bombay Castle, not far off from Mazgaon, remain out of Siddi's hands? Perhaps it was only a matter of time. But why the rulers, who had boldly captured Siddi's fleet - which was the root cause of all this trouble - had remained silent spectators without firing a single shot even

though they had an army well equipped with strong guns and cannons much superior to Siddi's?

When Rama Kamati was thinking like this, suddenly he could hear the booming of cannons indicating the movement of the troops from the Castle. He heaved a sigh of relief and told his men : "Can you not hear the sound of cannons booming? The army from the Castle must be marching to Mazgaon. Well, anyone of you would like to join the army? You will be trained how to wield the swords and how to defend yourself with the shield. The government will pay a handsome salary. I have been asked to enrol interested persons for the army."

They looked at each other. Some one asked, "Then what about serving for you, master?"

"Once the war is over, the government may not need such a big army. You may come back to me thereafter. If they continue your services you can do so and I shall get some other people to serve for me."

There were altogether twenty-five persons who had come from Mazgaon and Mahim out of which twenty readily agreed to join the army. They said they would bring their families to the city when they joined the army.

He told every one with an air of authority : "I shall pay some money now and all of you will have food in the eating house. Then you can move round in the city and request your friends and relatives to join the armed forces. Please inform everyone that time has now come to all of us to rise to the occasion to save the city of Mumbadevi."

They nodded their heads in assent. For the remaining five persons, he asked to serve either in his godown or in his office if willing, till the war was over. They readily agreed.

Then Rama Kamati hurriedly took his breakfast, with his wife in attendance. He briefly narrated to her all that had happened.

"You have now got all that you were waiting for years and make the best use of this opportunity to fulfil your dreams." She advised. But in the next instant she burst into tears and in a trembling voice said, "Wars and invasions should be restricted only to the fiction and stories

as they destroy every thing and end up in untold miseries and miseries only. I never thought that during our own lifetime we will have to face this calamity." Saying so she instantly wiped her tears as by then, finishing his breakfast Rama Kamati was ready to go. He stood for a while bowing down his head thinking deeply about the consequences of the war. But soon he realised that there was virtually no time to think as he had to mobilise maximum number of people to join the army if at all Bombay were to be defended. He silently threw a glance at her and patted on her shoulder. When he patted she touched his palm lovingly and wished in a whisper: "All success to you."

With that he took leave of his wife and went to the stable. The horse was waiting for him. He patted for a while and then mounted. The horse started trotting.

From his house, Rama Kamati went straight to the temple, dedicated to family deities, as in the early morning he could not go in. He prayed only for a while and without even waiting for the priest to chant a few mantras or give him the usual prasadam, he prostrated, sought God's grace in his new mission and left.

He went from house to house seeking support from the people to flush out the enemy. People responded very well by volunteering to join the army and fight and those who were unable to fight decided to help by way of cash or in kind. Those who had nothing to offer said, "We shall profusely bless and wish you all success and give you our full moral support." By the evening Rama Kamati could enrol around one thousand strong men but the war news was not only discouraging and disappointing but also was heart breaking. After capturing Mazgaon and Mahim forts, Siddi's men had reached the Dongri Hills and positioned their cannons in the direction of Bombay Castle to strike terror in the minds of the rulers. The English who had retreated from Mazgaon and Mahim without firing a single shot thought of confronting Siddis near Dongri and so in the morning a dedicated battalion of English troops fully armed with the latest weapons was dispatched. The Governor had nominated that day an experienced warrior as the lieutenant to suggest and supervise suitable strategy for a counter-attack and the lieutenant had gone with the troops which was under the English Commander. On the way, however, the Commander and the lieutenant had a difference of

opinion and the Commander felt insulted to receive instructions from the lieutenant when he was in command of the troops. The consequences were disastrous. The troops were divided never to fight under one banner. One faction deserted and the other innocently marched straight into the mouth of the Siddi's cannons allowing their bodies to be blasted into pieces!

Siddi Yakut Khan wanted now to march towards the Castle of Bombay but news came to him that the people of Bombay city had organised themselves into a huge army to meet any challenge. He therefore thought of remaining where he was as by then a substantial portion of the island had already come under his control. The Castle, the city and the southern tip of Bombay island - barely half a mile - remained with the English!

In the late evening, Rama Kamati returned home, exhausted. Since one o'clock at night he was moving round from place to place and meeting people, informing them of the need to save the city and then persuading them to join the army. His handsome personality, his courageous words, and his sincere approach was appreciated by everyone. He could win over every heart he met because of his name and goodwill, his fame and reputation as an honest treasury shroff and above all his benevolence and helping nature throughout his life. Till to-day he had never imagined that he was so popular in the city though he had no occasion to meet or talk to many of them personally....

On reaching home his wife welcomed him with gentle words full of affection and appreciation. After taking supper immediately he went to bed and for the first time she could see him sleep like a child : "Poor thing! Must have been greatly tired." She felt pity for him as she put out the lamp.

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12. BASKETFUL OF FRUITS

The next day -

At dawn Rama Kamati woke up.

"Hope you have had sound sleep." His wife was first to greet him in the morning.

"Yes!" He smiled. "I had not only sound sleep but also several dreams."

"Hope the dreams were good ones." She smiled again as if to cheer him up.

"But I don't remember any one of them! He said innocently : "You know how deadly tired I was! The moment my body touched the bed, I was lost in a deep slumber. Now tell me, was there any shot from the cannon, last night?"

"No, not at all!" She replied and then she cut a joke: "All that I could hear was your snore. It was more powerful than the booms of the cannon."

"Fine!" He heartily laughed. "That means you did not get sleep."

She did not reply immediately. After a pause thoughtfully she asked, "Tell me what is your programme to-day. Going to the Treasury or?"

"No Treasury!" He interrupted, "The Governor has asked me to enrol at least five thousand men to fight for Bombay. Yesterday I could get only about a thousand and therefore, I have got to continue the efforts. Only after completing this task assigned to me I shall go to the Treasury." He looked up at her face inquisitively. Her eyes were red with sleeplessness and face - dull with a shadow of anxiety clouding her mind. He went close to her and asked affectionately, "Why do you want to know more about my programme?"

She tried to smile, "I learn since long Shenoy uncle is bedridden. As he is unable to move out shall we call on him and seek his blessings before we embark on this adventure ? Is he not a wellwisher of our family for decades?" After keenly watching his eagerness to participate

actively in the war, indirectly she advised that fighting in the battlefield was not his business. She deliberately suggested a visit at that juncture as she recollected Narayan Shenoy's advice some years ago when he had seen the swords hanging on the wall.

Rama Kamati appreciated her advice. "I am glad you have reminded me of Shenoy uncle. We should have paid a visit long time ago but somehow for one reason or the other we could not do it. Now - today as well as tomorrow let me concentrate on the job of securing men for the army and thereafter I will be free. I think the day after tomorrow evening we should be able to visit. In the meantime I shall get a basketful of fruits to be gifted to him. After all when we visit the sick and the ailing we must not go empty-handed, you see!"

Hearing his words she felt relieved and her face looked cheerful and happy.....

With every moment bringing in the news of the atrocities by Siddi's men that day, Rama Kamati's job became easier as by then everyone felt the need for raising a strong army to defend the gates of the city.

On the third day by noon Rama Kamati completed the mission of enrolling five thousand strong men to the great admiration of Dorabji and the Governor. In the presence of the Governor, Dorabji profusely praised Rama Kamati and said that he deserved to be appointed the commander of the army of Bombay. Rama Kamati was very modest and replied that all that he did was just to defend Bombay, his hometown without expecting any reward, honour or position. He, however requested that he be given military training to handle the guns, mortars, shells, batteries and also the cannons so that in the hour of need his services would be availed of. The Governor, who in reality was the general of the armed forces was pleased to assure that his request would be duly complied with.

His mission over, Rama Kamati returned home much earlier than his wife had expected. With a feeling of great satisfaction he proudly declared, "All these days I was feeling indebted as I had drawn a lot of strength and inspiration from Bombay but to-day after providing people for the army to defend the city, I feel relieved as I have partially repaid that debt. Who knows, before long I might also be able to give

something more to Bombay. May God grant me the courage and strength to be a giver and not a receiver."

His wife looked at him admiringly and asked, "I think you must have been able to get the contingent of five thousand men."

"Why only five thousand?" He laughed and told in a lighter vein, "Five thousand and two. There is one house-wife also."

"House-wife?" She eagerly enquired: "Must be a very daring woman. By the by, tell me her name."

"She is a good house-wife. But the pity is that she is not at all daring." He pretended to be sober.

"Still woman joining army is a great news. Tell me who is that great lady!" Her curiosity increased.

"Who else could it be?" He pinched her cheek and laughed heartily, "You tell the name now."

She bowed her head down for a while her cheeks becoming red with blushes and in the next instant she raised, and announced boldly, "If you want me to join the army I'll and there is no hesitation. Before that teach me how to wield the sword. I will definitely join the army and serve for you!"

"Really?" He was surprised.

"Believe me!" she said fearlessly: "Today all my fear and anxiety is gone. If that queen of yore could fight and lay down her life for Mahikavati why not the women of today in Bombay? I learn Siddi Yakut Khan has landed with twenty five thousand soldiers whereas ours is..... how much?"

"Five thousand!" He meekly replied.

"Then how do you people think of defending Bombay with barely five thousand?" Her words were very sharp.

After a while she cautioned, "This is a very serious matter. Perhaps women, children and everyone may have to fight for Bombay, when the enemy is at the door-step. Please think over this very seriously and inform the authorities to take proper steps. Now, where is the fruit basket? We shall pay a visit to Shenoy uncle and come back early."

Followed by a servant carrying the basketful of fruits they instantly left for Narayan Shenoy's house. To the aged couple Narayan Shenoy and his wife their visit brought a pleasant surprise. Lying in the bed Narayan Shenoy in a low tone started the conversation with the usual phrase, "It is ages since I saw you."

And Rama Kamati repeating his words said, "Shenoy uncle, really it is ages since we met last time. You are no longer in service. Then these days you are not moving out also. Tell us, how are you?"

Reclining to a pillow Narayan Shenoy sat on the bed and feebly answered. "What can I say? There is no ailment greater than the old age. As such I do not have any complaint other than weakness. Sometimes there is no hunger and sometimes there is no sleep. That is all."

Rama Kamati sat down on the edge of the bed when the ladies stood in waiting and the old man continued to say, "By the by, Rama dear, how are you?"

"Fine!" He replied respectfully.

The old man stated, "I had asked my son to join your army to defend Bombay and yesterday he enrolled himself."

To Rama Kamati it was a news by itself. His mouth fell open out of surprise. Unbelievingly he gaped at the face of the once famous diplomat. Slowly Narayan Shenoy continued to state: "I know you will not believe me, because I was the person who had once dissuaded you from taking to arms. Rama, I have heard everything about your efforts to save Bombay. Really it is a great service to the city. People will remember you for ever!"

Rama Kamati bowed his head down out of humility and modesty. After a few moments he raised his head and requested, "Shenoy uncle, my wife is afraid of everything. Therefore both of us are here to seek your advice and blessings."

The old man smiled faintly and asked: "Where is your Goddess of Wealth, Laxmi?"

She came forward and touched his feet. He raised his right palm in a gesture of benediction and said, "You know Laxmi is not only the Goddess of Wealth but also Victory. Therefore, at times she is also called

Vijaya Lakshmi indicating success. Let this Laxmi of yours bring you great success!" Like this he blessed wholeheartedly.

"But," Rama Kamati feeling relieved and elated reminded, "Shenoy uncle, you have not given any counsel!"

"Did you not go to Mumbadevi's temple?" Meaningfully Narayan Shenoy asked.

Rama Kamati smiled, "I did go!"

"I know it!" The old man was certain: "What was Mumbadevi's commandment?"

"Wield the sword for the protection of the people of Bombay and I am with you!".

"Good!" The old man exclaimed: "Then why this hesitation? Go ahead!"

"Yes, I will!" Rama Kamati asserted with abundant confidence: "But our army is too small to beat back Siddi's. They say he has landed with twenty five thousand soldiers."

"Who gave you this number?" Narayan Shenoy authoritatively enquired.

"Why?" Rama Kamati asked.

"Twenty five thousand was the figure of the day before yesterday. Today it is forty thousand. Siddi Yakut Khan, I learn has arranged in such a way that each moment his army should rapidly multiply by leaps and bounds to keep the rulers of Bombay on their toes."

"Then what is your suggestion?" Rama Kamati anxiously asked.

"Well, do not restrict your number to only five thousand. Those who want to serve Bombay by joining the army, allow them to join. Let it be a continuous process. Then, even if you are tempted - I know there will be a temptation - to try to beat the enemy back, never venture. An untrained army is nothing but a flock of sheep. Till the soldiers are properly trained it is enough if you guard the gates of the city. Yakut Khan will never venture to attack the city - do you know why?"

"No, I don't know!" Rama Kamati franky admitted his ignorance. "Yakut Khan knows for certain that only the rulers are timid but not the

inhabitants. He also knows that if all will join together he can be driven out any moment. Therefore he will not try to break open the gates of the city."

Rama Kamati pondered over all that had been told by Narayan Shenoy. In spite of his old age and failing health, his analytical ability was superb, felt he.

With that the visit was over. After gifting the basket of fruits Rama Kamati and his wife, took leave of the aged couple, touching their feet and again seeking the blessings .

On the way Rama Kamati enquired, "How did you like the visit?"

"Really it was good!" She admitted: "All these days I was feeling tense, worried and anxious about everything. Now I feel relieved." She looked up at the sky and to her view came a few birds flying high in the sky. Pointing to them she said, "Now my mind is like those birds flying higher and higher trying to reach greater and greater heights. I am proud of you." She softly touched his arm with great affection.

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13. THE LAST BATTLE

The next few days saw feverish military activities in Bombay. Although Siddi Yakut Khan did not make any advance towards the city, his cannons positioned on the Dongri Hills under his flag served as a stern warning to the English not to make any misadventure to flush his army out.

The small English army battered and bruised had no courage to launch any more offensive and for the time being they decided to be on the defensive guarding the Castle and the city besides imparting military training to the new recruits.

Under instructions from the General, Rama Kamati received a special training not only to fight on the land and sea but also to develop and implement various strategies and techniques of war. Being on the roll of the Government Treasury still as a Shroff, now he had one more

duty to perform every day. He should go round the military camps, talk to the new recruits, enthuse them to learn the things as expeditiously as possible and then get ready to fight the enemy. His name and fame, his articulate and sincere words and above all, his imposing personality had their own charm on the minds of the young recruits who held him in high esteem as their hero.

But Siddi Yakut Khan did not take Rama Kamati's actions kindly. He regarded Rama Kamati as a thorn on the way. Being unable to cause him any harm directly, he decided to do something else after secretly confiding with his men.

One of the afternoons when Rama Kamati was at his residence to take food, two of his servants from Sewree came running. Although they were in disguise, Rama Kamati recognised them at once. They were looking pale, nervous and shaken.

When Rama Kamati enquired what the matter was, they broke into tears and reported, "Master, what can we say? Siddi's men raided our orchards and chopped off all the trees. Then they also cut down all the five hundred coconut palms in our garden. Now nothing remains, master, nothing remains!" They shed tears and sobbed. To Rama Kamati the news of destruction of gardens came like a bolt from the blue. He stood speechless knowing not what to do or speak. His wife who had overheard the conversation however was not at all moved by the tidings of the loss. She came forward and asked, "Are you all safe? What about the other servants?"

"Mother," plight still reflecting in the eyes, with a broken voice they said, "What can we say? They dragged us out from the gardens and when we resisted were beaten up badly. Please look at these!" They showed their bruises.

Forgetting the loss she at once asked, "Have you taken food?"

"No, mother!" They replied. "Since morning we have not taken a single drop of water. We wanted to report to the master first and then only take care of ourselves. We came here almost running, that too in the guise of beggars to escape from the attention of the enemy."

She was moved by their sincerity and loyalty, "Wait a little. I shall prepare food for you. Now go to the back yard and have a wash. We

shall get you some medicines ready by then." Then she turned to her husband and asked him, "Don't delay ! Please rush all the help to the other servants at Sewree."

Rama Kamati mechanically nodded his head in assent.....

The citizens of Bombay city had thought that Siddi and his men would depart soon after bringing under their sway almost all the seven Islands of Bombay leaving only a small portion to the English. But contrary to their expectations Yakut Khan continued his raids systematically in one or the other island and showed no signs of hurry to return.

Then contrary to Narayan Shenoy's belief, the Siddis also tried to capture the gates of the city several times but the people and the newly formed army bravely repelled the attack everytime.

As the time passed, the people and the government understood the hard realities. Monsoon came and with it the sowing season. But, vast stretches of land now under Siddi's control lay fallow without any tiller to attend. Thus in Bombay all agricultural activities came to a complete halt.

Siddi's army took a respite during monsoon. The senior padre of Bandra under Portuguese control made all arrangements to supply foodstuff to Siddi's men uninterruptingly but the people in the city without any arrangement for procuring food grains were put to a great deal of hardship. And there was no help forthcoming from any quarters.

Festival of Ganapati was celebrated quietly by the people of Bombay without much fanfare. Then came Dasara and thereafter Diwali - the festival of lights adorning every home. With greater enthusiasm year after year, Bombay Bazar used to celebrate Diwali with all pomp and gaiety, fully decorating the whole Bazar with rows of glowing clay tray lamps, flowers, festoons and paper lanterns, and also night-long display of fireworks, but this time with gloom and grief everywhere, none was in a mood to celebrate even this festival of festivals. However, during every festival the people invariably offered fervent prayers to God to hasten Siddi's departure from Bombay so that they could regain freedom to lead a normal life.

But with each day passing, Siddi's men were growing stronger and firmer with their roots growing deeper and deeper into the soil of

Bombay. After Diwali almost everyday they were trying to capture the city and it was only the initiative and enthusiasm of the newborn army with a sense of loyalty to Bombay could beat them back. Rama Kamati now well-versed to tackle any situation was always in the vanguard inducing, inspiring and encouraging people to fight back. Some times he would lead the soldiers on the horseback and sometimes, troops on the foot. Sometimes he would be in the firing line to give instructions to fire cannons and mortars and sometimes with the officers of the English army to discuss and devise various strategies to implement them.

On the whole, the new army of the native recruits with the English army was successful in stopping Siddi's army from entering the city as well as its prestigious Bazar but everyone felt that unless Siddi departed, normalcy in Bombay could never be restored.

But how could Bombay make an offensive when Siddi's army was eight to ten times bigger at least in numbers ? Therefore at the level of government the process of rethinking on the whole matter began and finally it was decided to send two envoys to the court of the Moghul Emperor - Aurangzeb - Siddi's master to prevail upon him to instruct Siddi Yakut Khan to leave Bombay at once.

Although the envoys were sent, here in Bombay the Government could not rest on oars as day by day Siddi's atrocities increased and it was becoming more and more difficult to cope with his everyday attack.

Thus a year rolled by and exactly on the same day - the 14th of February, 1690 Siddi's army once again appeared at the gates of Bombay city. Rama Kamati was in command of the battalion handling mortars in the firing line. From the very beginning that day he ably resisted the enemy's advance and the exchange of fire continued for a long time. As they could not make any advance, in the evening, Siddi's men started retreating and on seeing this, Rama Kamati feeling elated ordered his men to fire unceasingly to inflict maximum casualties. Shot after shot went but unexpectedly one of the mortars exploded as soon as it was fired with disastrous consequences. Suddenly in the firing line appeared furious flames of fire accompanied by thick clouds of smoke. The accident was so unexpected that everyone was dazed. There were loud cries and moans everywhere and all the jubilation they had earlier on the retreat of the enemy was lost in a minute. As soon as the smoke

disappeared and the flames died down the scene of the accident looked horrible beyond anybody's comprehension. It was a tragic accident by itself which nobody could anticipate or prevent.

The troops of the enemy had already retreated and therefore there was no fear of their return and resumption of the attack again. So those who were alive and unhurt swiftly started rescue operations. Quite a few dead bodies were lying haphazardly with the blast and along with them, was identified Rama Kamati, lying motionless with his eyes closed.

On seeing him, ignoring all others, the warriors rushed to the spot, unbelieving. They stood there gazing but someone among them more resourceful, bowed and took his right arm in his and examined. It was warm and the pulse was still beating. "Hey!" He sent out a joyous shout, "He is alive. Rama Kamati is alive!"

Hearing, everybody there hailed cheerfully. "Long live Rama Kamati!" As if awakened from a deep slumber, by their greetings, Rama Kamati slowly opened his eyes.

The warriors were very happy. They again cheered : "Long live Rama Kamati! Long live Rama Kamati!" Still lying on the ground, Rama Kamati smiled acknowledging their greetings even though there was a terrific pain in his legs. Then he thought of getting up but he was unable to stir even by an inch. There was a severe pain all over the body and yet he tried again and again but he was unable to move. Looking at his helplessness the warrior who had examined him earlier came to his help. He bowed down to see why he was unable to rise. Suddenly to his view came a pool of blood beneath his legs and blood was still oozing out. Yes - Rama Kamati was badly wounded in the right leg that was still bleeding. At once the soldier sought the help of his colleagues to take Rama Kamati to a place of safety for an emergency treatment.

But Rama Kamati was not willing! In a feeble tone, he asked moaning: "Has the enemy retreated? If the Siddi's men are still round the corner to make a surprise attack again, please ignore me and keep on fighting. I would prefer to die in the battlefield rather than fleeing away."

"But, Sir!" They replied in a chorus : "The enemy's troops are no longer in sight. They are already gone. We shall take you to"....

"Take me home and nowhere else." He requested them trying to endure the pain very patiently.

His return as a wounded warrior was not at all expected at home and therefore on seeing him in a pathetic condition his wife was about to burst into tears but with great courage she controlled her feelings and tears. Still her eyes turned red, throat choked and she became tongue-tied, knowing not what to do in such a grim situation.

The warriors who had brought him home reported all that had happened and declared that he had a providential escape to be the sole survivor in the accidental explosion while several others had lost their lives.

Without further loss of time the family physician was summoned. He came, examined quickly but thoroughly and then concluded: "There is absolutely nothing to worry. Yes - there is a big wound in the leg but it will soon heal with a proper bandage and medicines." He then opened his bag of medicines, started his work and advised, "Next fifteen days, Mr. Kamati must not move out."

"Fifteen days?" Rama Kamati exclaimed: "Who will look after the safety of my Bombay till then?"

The warriors who had brought him home were still there. Surprised, they looked at each other and assured, "Sir, you have kindled the fire within our mind and heart. Therefore, you must leave that worry to us and take complete rest. Till you return we shall keep on fighting. This is our promise." Assuring like this, they took leave wishing him speedy recovery.

Almost after a month the physician declared that the wound had completely cured and that Rama Kamati was fit to resume his normal duties.

"Can I go straight to the firing line?" Eagerly he sought the permission of the physician.

"Why only the firing line? You can even go to the den of Siddi Yakut Khan and shake hands with him!" The physician cut a joke and heartily laughed. But Rama Kamati could not follow what he meant.

With eyes wide open he asked, "I beg your pardon. Can you explain what you have told just now?"

"Oh, yes!" The physician slowly explained: "Perhaps yours is the last battle in Bombay and I am sure there will be no more wars on the soil of Bombay."

"Really?" Rama Kamati did not believe. His eyes shone for a while out of excitement.

"Yes!" said the physician : "The envoys sent by the English to the court of the Moghul Emperor have returned with a Firman, the so-called order from the Emperor asking Siddi Yakut Khan to evacuate from Bombay. The Moghuls have imposed a fine of Rs.1,50,000/- on the English for all the mischiefs they created by confiscating the fleet of the Siddis'. Then they are also asked to restore all the goods the ships carried. The most interesting condition stipulated by Aurangzeb is the expulsion of the Governor Sir John Child from India, who he believes is the root cause of all this mess! Now tell me how do you like the Firman?"

Rama Kamati did not reply at once. He thought for a while and then said, "The fine is very exorbitant and it is too much to ask for the expulsion of the head of a government. Fortunately for the English, the Governor Sir John Child passed away on the 4th January and the problem of expulsion was automatically solved.. Anyway peace has to be bought and the English, it seems were bent upon buying it at any cost. But it is a good bargain. Pay one and a half lacs of rupees and buy back Bombay as well as peace!"

The physician approvingly grinned : "After all it is politics. We, as commoners, have nothing to do with it. Whether the ruler is Lord Rama or the demon King Ravana, the commoner has to work hard to earn a living. To me both the Siddi Chief Yakut Khan or these white faced - English headed by Sir John Child were one and the same. Does it make any difference if Siddis were to rule over Bombay instead of the English?"

Rama Kamati did not want to drag on the discussion any longer. He simply smiled and concluded : "After all for the people of Bombay there is no choice. It is unfortunate that both the giants, Aurangazeb and Shivaji in their fight between themselves could not

get time even to throw a fleeting glance at these islands. Perhaps from their point of view this cluster of seven islands is nothing but a barren heap of soil good for nothing. But to the English, in the same cluster of islands every grain of sand, has proved to be a grain of gold. It appears they have come here with a magical plough that gives them the rich harvest of gold. You may be aware that Bombay is prospering only because of the international trade. If Siddis were to rule, our boats may not reach even Goa." After telling like this, Rama Kamati felt, "Now that the Moghul Emperor has issued the 'Firman' Siddi Yakut Khan must be preparing for the withdrawal from Bombay".....

"Well", replied the physician : "That is the biggest joke. Yakut Khan is still in Bombay with all his men and he has no intention of leaving early. The only gratifying fact is that he has stopped the atrocities now."

"That means the threat still persists." Rama Kamati was looking worried: "How can he overlook the command of his masters'? This looks strange. Really strange!"

The physician rose to go : "Everything is possible in politics. You must be knowing that age old saying - 'You pretend to weep while I pretend to beat.' Both are good at their respective tricks".....

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14. THE ANGEL OF THE HEART

Rama Kamati was back at work. On the first day everyone congratulated him for the valour he had shown during the last battle. More than that the people wondered at the way he survived the explosion when all others, around that fateful mortar had died. "God must have been very kind and gracious to him." They were telling in his hearing.

"Throughout my life when I have not caused any harm to anybody, how could I get hurt?" Rama Kamati would think sometimes in this

way on hearing but in the next instant his mind would bring back the thrilling memory of the vision he had on the first day of the siege : The graceful countenance of Mumbadevi he could see for a moment, the echo of her words he could hear in his heart and the inspiration he could draw to fight. "Yes! It was only Mumbadevi and her grace that must have saved me from the disaster." He would gratefully acknowledge : "Even the healing of the deep wound in the leg within a short time looks like a miracle. Her grace and only her grace must have played a major role in warding off the danger." With this belief firm in mind now he had become more modest and polite than ever when people appreciated his valour.

Here in the diplomatic front even though the Emperor had issued the Firman on the 27th February, 1690 agreeing to Siddi's evacuation, it had virtually no effect on Siddi Yakut Khan and his stooges. Upon receiving the Firman although they had stopped harassing the innocent people they were least inclined to leave Bombay. After a lot of diplomatic activities, correspondence and persuasion Yakut Khan openly demanded a handsome treasure to inspire him to leave Bombay. That, however, was not a problem, the wealthy East India Company thought but where was the guarantee that he would make an exit after the delivery of the treasure? It was a matter of mutual trust and the English, losing on every count, finally thought of taking the biggest ever risk by sending caskets of treasure to satisfy the greedy Moghul Admiral whose master had already collected a fabulous sum of one and a half lakhs of rupees by way of a fine. Thus on the 22nd June, 1690 after dilly-dallying for a long time Siddi Yakut Khan with his forty thousand strong men finally left the shores of Bombay for Danda - Rajpuri his place. During his reign of terror for more than sixteen months, he reduced Bombay to a basketful of debris bringing in ruination and untold miseries to hundreds of people.

At long last the English heaved a sigh of relief and so did the inhabitants.

After Siddi's departure when the rains touched the soil of Bombay, people merrily danced in the downpours to express their joy as,they

could not till their land, sow seeds and grow food-grains and vegetables, which were scarce during the siege.

Poor Rama Kamati! His contribution to the defence of Bombay was significant and so were his losses. At the very beginning of the siege itself, Siddi Yakut Khan had systematically destroyed his orchards and coconut gardens. Therefore the very next day of Siddi's departure, he went to Mazgaon and Sewree to see for himself the fate of his gardens and coconut palms.

After visiting his garden at Mazgaon completely destroyed, he went to Sewree, almost broken.

The beautiful garden that had five hundred fully grown coconut palms, with bunches and bunches of coconuts was now looking like a vast graveyard with the butts of the cut down trees resembling the tomb stones. To Rama Kamati the sight became unbearable. He knelt down and embraced one of the butts as though it was his child and wept like a tiny tot. Then out of deep sorrow he loudly uttered, "Hey Siddi Yakut Khan, what harm have these innocent trees caused you to cut them down brutally like this? You merciless fellow ! Take it from me that even Allah, the merciful will not pardon this heinous crime of yours. And remember! By this ignoble act, now itself you have reserved a high place for yourself in the hell! Did you hear me? You will go to hell!" He loudly said with all his might.

After pouring out his feelings like this, he felt relieved and wiped his tears. Totally shaken by the wanton destruction of gardens, glades and groves he looked completely lost. He now had to start everything afresh. He had to buy seedlings and saplings and they might take four to five years to reach the fruit bearing stage.

During the siege he could not attend to his trading activities, either. Therefore when the war ended Rama Kamati was in a big deficit. Knowing not what to do next he became desparately worried and his wife! She could sense his agony in time and one day she tried to console: "Dear, by simply brooding, our problems will never come to an end. When the city as a whole has received the setback how can we be an exception?"

"But," Rama Kamati with abundant agony in heart sadly said, "There is no doubt that Bombay has suffered, but when we compare the loss suffered by individuals, I have suffered the most. Just think! A big chunk of my income used to come from coconut gardens and other orchards. Now I do not have even an anna to invest either in gardens or in business!"

" No money?" On hearing, she was stunned.

" To tell you honestly I am left with a big deficit!" He feebly smiled : "During the siege, at times I had to entertain the soldiers and give costly presents to inspire and motivate them to fight. After all, I thought it was my sacred duty to pledge everything to save Bombay" .

His wife never showed any signs of sorrow when she heard his tale of woes on account of the financial crisis. She asked him to wait for a while, walked in and in the next instant came back with her box of jewellery. Proffering to him she lovingly said, "Please take this and sell all the ornaments." Her offer was so sudden and unexpected that Rama Kamati could not believe. Dumbfounded he looked bewildered. Violently shaking his head after a while he thrust back the box in her hands, "I never thought that you will humiliate me in this way by giving away all your jewellery for sale. What is this? Your hands, neck and ears everything looks bare. I cannot bear this sight! For heaven's sake, please -please take back and put on the jewels."

"Dear, dear!" His wife unmoved, entreated: "Don't get upset. Please! There should not be a scope for sentiments, either. After all they are ornaments - a secret reserve to be drawn at the time of an emergency. To a dedicated housewife, her husband and children only will constitute the real wealth and nothing else. Therefore all other things, however precious they are, they are only a make-believe wealth. Believe me, I am handing over this jewellery to preserve the name and fame of the famous Rama Kamati who is always a giver and not a receiver. When this is the position, you can sell the ornaments instead of begging or borrowing from somebody!"

Rama Kamati remembered at once his own words at the beginning of the siege. Well, if the ornaments were not sold and

business not restarted what was the way out to earn a living? He was engrossed in serious thinking.

His wife again appealed : "Why are you hesitating? Have faith in God and sell the ornaments to restart the business as well as farming. I am quite confident that before long you will be able to earn enough to buy me jewellery worth more than this."

Feeling guilty Rama Kamati received the casket half-heartedly without uttering a single word. Somehow he was feeling that he should appeal to the government soliciting their help, if not a compensation for all the loss he had incurred on account of his active participation in the war. He consulted Dorabji who advised that in the fitness of things Rama Kamati should make an appeal at once even though the government might not be in a position to render immediate help because of the collapse of trade of the East India Company during the siege. When the things would improve he felt, the government might definitely recognise his meritorious services as he himself had heard the Governor's words of appreciation for Rama Kamati.

He also suggested that Rama Kamati should prepare the appeal in duplicate and the original be handed over personally to the Company's bosses in Surat while the copy to the Deputy Governor in Bombay.

" But how to reach Surat?" Rama Kamati who was rarely out of Bombay that too not beyond Bassein-Vasai, asked.

"Why?" Dorabji enquired wondering. Then he suggested as though it was very simple: "Buy a ship and sail away to Surat!"

"What a good suggestion!" Rama Kamati let loose a loud peal of laughter: "A very good suggestion indeed! When I can't think of even the copper coin 'ree' - you suggest me to think in terms of the gold coin 'pagoda'."

But Dorabji was sincere: " Ramji, think big and grow big; otherwise you will remain small. The pattern of business in Bombay is rapidly changing. Shipping as a business is going to flourish in Bombay. Buy one or two ships and see for yourself how your money will multiply in no time."

On hearing Rama Kamati's eyes shone. Now he could see light in

the darkness. Dorabji had shown him the way. He had to appeal for help from the government and then start a new line of business. With his spirits restored, he thanked Dorabji and returned home.

His wife as usual was a good counsellor. As the rainy season has set in, she suggested that he should at once buy the seedlings and saplings and entrust the work of planting to the servants. Then he should write down his appeal and go personally to Surat. On the way back he should break the journey at Vasai and meet his younger brother, Narayan Kamati nicknamed as Lolla, looking after the family business there to seek his assistance if willing, to start the new line of business - shipping. Instead of going by a boat or a ship and sail in the rough weather she suggested that he could travel on horseback so that he would be able to break and resume the journey as he wished.

Accordingly, Rama Kamati travelled on horseback. The journey was very pleasant. It provided him with a well-deserved holiday and a break soon after his recovery from injuries in the leg as well as the tension-packed life during the hostilities.

The lush green gardens and forests, blue hillocks and hills, silvery streams and rivers and above all the friendly people on the way - it was really a refreshing and rewarding experience. As he was travelling, to his mind came the thoughts of his home, his children and his wife. Away from home he felt he could see a clearer view of all. His sons were growing up and they had to be given proper education and training. And his wife! What a noble lady she was! Apart from the outward appearance, beautiful and charming, from time to time she had risen to the occasion and exhibited rare virtues like simplicity and generosity, courage and self-confidence and patience and perseverance. To him she was not only a true life-partner sharing with his grief and joy, sadness and happiness and setback and success, but also the angel of his heart meriting full honour. Really, she was a rare gem....

As the horse was speedily galloping, his heart was swollen with abundant pride that he was blessed with such a rare jewel but after a while his heart shrank at the very thought that he had to sell all her ornaments including the sacred 'thali'. This painful thought lingered for

quite sometime in his mind and at last he felt relieved only when he could resolve that once his business would pick up it would be his first and foremost duty to buy ornaments and present them to her, if possible with a few more as an appreciation.

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15. THE SILK SARI FROM SURAT

The onward journey from Bulsar was really exhilarating. Rama Kamati was fascinated by the sight of the green gardens of mangoes in Bulsar stretching for miles together. Then came Navsari full of orchards and gardens of flowers and fruits. After passing through Navsari to his view came the sugar-cane crop stretching up to the horizon and as Surat - the gift of the River Tapati, was nearing it was now the turn of banana and papaya plants grown in hundreds and thousands on the fertile basin of the river.

It was mid-day when he reached the historic city of Surat, now the most populous and prosperous city in the Western India. There was no restriction for the entry inside the huge gateway and Rama Kamati, without anybody questioning, entered Surat. After entry he asked somebody's guidance to reach the headquarters of the East India Company.

The main factory of the company was standing on the banks of the River Tapati and there were two routes. One could either take the roundabout route bordering the city, or the route going criss-cross in the busy city with several lanes and by lanes with every chance of losing the track. Therefore, he was advised to take the round about but the sure route.

Surat, the city of silk, gold and diamonds, - liked by all women the world over, was humming with activity.

Although it was the month of June, rain was yet to fall. The sky was clear and cloudless with the sun bright and shining.

Rama Kamati reached the bank of the River Tapati a river much

broader than the River of Mahim. It was much more crowded with the boats and sea-going vessels than the harbour of Bombay suggesting that Surat had a larger volume of international trade than Bombay.

Not spending more time in surveying the river or its banks, he went straight to the Company's headquarters.

The huge signboard reading M/s East India Company welcomed him. The gates were wide open, but on both the sides were watchmen guarding the gates. Upon seeing the signboard, Rama Kamati got down from the horse and leading the horse walked up to the gate.

Before the watchman could ask who he was, Rama Kamati told that he was the Treasury Shroff of the Company and had come all the way from Bombay to meet the President and the Council of the Company.

One of the watchmen ran in and came back in a minute with the receptionist of the Company. He heartily greeted Rama Kamati : "Welcome to the Headquarters and welcome to Surat. Now tell me the purpose of your visit. I am the receptionist over here."

"I have come all the way from Bombay." Rama Kamati politely declared : " To meet the President of the Council to hand over an appeal of mine seeking the help and assistance of the Honourable Company. In the recent siege of Bombay, I have suffered a lot."

The receptionist bowed his head down for a while as if to recollect something and then suddenly asked, " Are you the same Rama Kamati who collected people to raise an army against Siddi Yakut Khan?"

"Yes, sir!" Rama Kamati replied proudly.

"Were you the same person who was seriously injured in that explosion?"

With a smile he acknowledged and then asked: "How did you know all these things?"

"Oh - everyone over here knows. The previous Governor Sir John Child was always appreciating your efforts. Now tell me when did you arrive?"

"Just now!" Then he hesitatingly told: "I don't know anybody over here." The receptionist said, "Don't you worry. Now I shall take you to our rest-house. There you can first have a wash and then food. Incidentally there is going to be a meeting of the Council at three o' clock today. I shall inform the Secretary about your desire to have an audience with our Honourable President Mr Harris. He will certainly oblige!"

Rama Kamati felt relieved. He profusely thanked the receptionist.

At three the receptionist came to the rest-house and escorted Rama Kamati to the Council Hall where President Harris was sitting on a majestic chair at the head of a big table with his members of the Council, three each sitting on either of his side.

After ushering Rama Kamati in, the receptionist bowed respectfully and announced, "Honourable Sirs, Mr. Rama Kamati, Shroff of our Treasury in Bombay." Again he bowed and excused himself away.

Rama Kamati bowed his head respectfully and clasped his hands as a mark of respect to his employers.

President Harris in an unusual gesture of welcome stood up and asked other members of the Council also to stand up. Then all of them clapped their hands in an applause as if to accord him a hero's welcome. With all humility Rama Kamati, still joining his palms acknowledged their appreciation.

After a while President Harris sat down and others too. He asked Rama Kamati to take his seat on one of the chairs away from the table. Rama Kamati as a mark of respect to the authority said, he would like to stand.

The proceedings of the meeting began. The President welcoming Rama Kamati praised his meritorious service to the Honourable Company both during war-at the time of Siddi's invasion and peace- at the time of coinage fraud a decade ago. Then he asked, "Now Mr. Ramji Bhai, can you tell us the purpose of your visit?"

Rama Kamati briefly narrated the catastrophe that had befallen on him on account of the invasion by Siddi. He emphatically stated that

he had to lose everything because of his connections with the rulers of Bombay. Therefore he said he had come all the way to enlist the support and assistance for rehabilitation. He disclosed that he was here not to seek a reward but only the help. He also reminded that the late Governor of Bombay had promised him all assistance once the hostilities were over. Then he handed over his appeal in which he had elaborately mentioned his service to the East India Company and thereby the difficulties he was put to.

The President and the Council heard his plea with all seriousness and rapt attention.

Then the President requested Rama Kamati to wait in the ante-chamber of the Council Hall till they discussed his appeal. Rama Kamati obeyed.

Exactly after fifteen minutes he was called in. The President informed: "Mr Rama Kamati, the Council has perused your appeal and all of us sympathise with you. In appreciation of your loyal service we shall definitely help you to come out of your difficulties but the protocol demands that we should call for the recommendation of the Castle of Bombay. We shall therefore give you our letter to them and please ask them to send us at once their recommendations. In the meantime tell us whether we can be of any help to you in your trading activities in the personal capacity."

Seizing the opportunity Rama Kamati said politely:

"Honourable Sirs, I have no words to express my sense of gratitude. My business is completely ruined and I have to revive it. Side by side, I intend to start shipping as a new line of activity. I learn ships are sold at throwaway prices in Surat. Through your good offices can I buy a sea-going vessel at a reasonable price?"

The President considered this for a while and then enquired, "What is your financial outlay?"

Rama Kamati bowed down his head and replied, "I have sold my wife's gold to revive the business. I can spare Rs 10,000/- at the most."

The President felt pity: "Mr. Rama Kamati, ships are normally acquired in a pair. Rs 10,000/- is sufficient just to buy one. But we can

help you by giving you a loan on soft terms. We can also hire your ships for carrying our goods. Now that you are here in Surat please pay a visit to the shipyards and select two ships. During rainy season we shall get them overhauled and painted to make them seaworthy. After all, shipping activities can start only after the monsoon withdraws...."

"But Your Excellency," Rama Kamati hastened to state: "I have not brought any money to pay."

The President smiled: "Don't you worry. We shall pay on your account here and you can reimburse in Bombay. Our receptionist will now take you round the city today and shipyards tomorrow. You will stay in the rest-house as our guest and the day after tomorrow you can return to Bombay."

Rama Kamati bowed his head down to express his gratefulness and then left the Council Hall fully satisfied. The receptionist escorted him back to the rest-house and requested him to get ready within next fifteen minutes to go round the city.

They went by the official horse-drawn carriage of the Company. The receptionist took great care to take him to all the important places like temples, markets and bazar. The entire city was humming with activities. In its belly, each and every house, had a commercial activity - weaving, carving, cutting, processing and dyeing. The end products were mostly silk saris and shawls, gold and diamond ornaments and silver wares and utensils. Rama Kamati felt that in respect of wealth and prosperity while compared, Bombay was just a bud and Surat a flower in full bloom. Perhaps for this reason only Shivaji Raje must have raided Surat twice.....

As they were passing through the cloth market with silk and silk everywhere the receptionist asked, " Mr. Kamati, would you not like to buy anything here?"

"No!" Rama Kamati smiled: "Actually I have brought money just to meet the expenses on the way."

The receptionist slowly said: "You know Surat is famous for saris. I thought you may like to buy one for your wife."

At the mention of his wife, Rama Kamati suddenly became

pensive. Yes! Of his own he should have thought of buying a gift for her.....

At the sunset the carriage returned to the rest-house and Rama Kamati got down. The receptionist wished, "Good-night, Mr. Kamati. See you again tomorrow morning!"

Rama Kamati wished back gaily: "Good-night. Thank you!" As he entered his room, the cook came in and asked, "Sir, what dishes would you like to have at night?"

"Oh, only dal and vegetables. Then a bowl of rice and a glass of milk, if possible!" The cook bowed obediently and went back.

As he sat on the chair, the words of the receptionist echoed in his ears. "I thought you may like to buy a silk sari for your wife." The words kept on ringing in his ears for a long time. "Can I borrow some money here to buy a sari and repay at Bombay?" Thought he, but suddenly he changed his mind. "Such a small amount what the authorities will think of me and my credibility thereafter?" After all his wife had never asked him to fetch anything from Surat. Then why this fuss? But the silk sari from Surat symbolising his affection would definitely please her who had stood by him all along through thick and thin....

In the morning the next day -

The carriage came and with it the receptionist too. He informed that the President had made elaborate arrangements in the shipyards to inspect thoroughly the vessels he proposed to buy. But poor Rama Kamati! Since yesterday evening he was restless. Of his own when he was unable to buy a single silk sari for his wife, how could he think of managing two ships?

"I hope you had a sound sleep." The receptionist added, "But your eyes - why do they look dull and red?"

Rama Kamati slowly smiled trying to cover his agony: "After all new place. Could not sleep well."

"Shall we go? The carriage is ready." The receptionist enquired.

"Yes!" Rama Kamati agreed.

Then they went to the shipyards on the banks of the Tapati and Rama Kamati selected to ships of his liking. The receptionist marked their names and said, "We shall report of your selection to the President. On your behalf our Company will go through the formalities of the purchase. For that you may have to sign an authorisation in our favour."

Rama Kamati agreed with a sense of achieving something in life. Then they came near the carriage. Now Rama Kamati stretched his right hand to open the door of the carriage, But suddenly his eyes caught sight of his ring in the finger. He at once withdrew his arm and stared at it as if he had found out his ring just now though lost and forgotten long time ago. He wondered: How could it escape his attention all these days when every grain of gold in his home was sold? His wife, did she notice or not? Or having noticed kept quiet feeling that as the head of the family at least he should wear some gold on behalf of the family? The more he looked at it the more he felt guilty.

The receptionist unmindful of his not opening the door came forward and opened the door widely and requested, "Mr. Kamati, please get in! ...."

Rama Kamati got in silently and took his seat. A sudden thought struck his mind. He asked the receptionist, "Can we go to the cloth market?"

" Why not?" The receptionist asked wondering "But you said you don't have enough money !"

"In fact," Rama Kamati after a while frankly disclosed, "even now I don't have enough money to buy a silk sari. But I have thought of something else." He showed the ring in his finger, smiled brightly and then slowly took it out.

Mischievously the receptionist laughed. "You must be loving your wife very dearly. That is why you must have thought of selling your ring. Am I right, Mr Kamati?"

"A wife like mine is a rare thing on this earth!" He wanted to say but shyness overtook his feelings. He simply smiled - a broad smile signalling a sense of achievement greater than even buying the ships. But somehow without his knowledge tears appeared in his eyes which he promptly wiped.

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16. STRANGE NAVAL BATTLE

Instead of Bombay, Rama Kamati took delivery of the ships in Surat itself. Then he loaded both the ships, one with the cargo of silk and the other with gold ornaments studded with diamonds worth crores of rupees. He thought that on arrival in Bombay they would sell like hot cakes and bring him fabulous wealth, to enable him to buy and sell precious things like silk, silver, gold and diamonds over and over again.

The twin ships on their maiden voyage were nearing Bombay. Rama Kamati himself was in command. But suddenly the mates of both the ships reported that a fleet of about one hundred ships was charging from all the sides towards these two ships to attack and sink. And on all those ships were fluttering the flags of Siddis clearly suggesting that they belonged to Siddi Yakut Khan.

They were sailing at a speed equal oniy to that of lightning and knowing not what to do next, Rama Kamati prayed to his family deity Lord Venkataramana and the guardian deity of Bombay, Goddess Mumbadevi for succour and help.

The enemy's fleet came closer. Siddi Yakut Khan seated on a high throne threatened: "Hey Rama, you mobilised support to the English in spite of my felling down all the trees in your groves and gardens and you foiled all my attempts to take full control of Bombay and now you have thought of associating yourself with the whitefaced foreigners in their tricks and trade. Therefore I have decided to frustrate all your endeavours to come up in life. And these two newly acquired ships of yours! They will meet the same fate your gardens have met with. Beware!"

Hearing his words of threat, afraid not was Rama Kamati nor his men! On the contrary boldly he pooh poohed: "When Mumbadevi herself had asked me to protect the city, I don't care for your empty threats. Get away with your fleet or else...." Courageously Rama Kamati challenged.

"Well, pray to your Goddess once more before you enter the watery grave!" The Siddi Chief thundered.

"Yes, I will!" Shouted Rama Kamati and closed his eyes to offer a

silent prayer to the Mother Goddess for protection. Instantly she appeared and ordained, "Child, make use of the cannons fitted to your ships and leave all the worries to me!"

"Fire!" With abundant self-confidence Rama Kamati ordered his men. Shot after shot went in quick succession and before long all the ships belonging to Siddi's sank like paper boats in the sea. Watching his fleet totally sunk to save his soul the war-lord swiftly vanished!

With his precious cargo, ships and the crew intact Rama Kamati reached the harbour of Bombay and to his pleasant surprise the Governor with the prominent citizens of Bombay was waiting for him to accord a red carpet welcome. He congratulated Rama Kamati for successfully driving away Siddis - never to make appearance again in Bombay with their fleet sunk and gone for ever. The Governor made an announcement publicly that Rama Kamati was appointed the Commander of Armed forces in appreciation and everyone there cheered him up by shouting thrice: "Long live Rama Kamati!" Then from the gathering emerged Narayan Shenoy with a walking stick in his left hand and a garland in right hand. On seeing, Rama Kamati ran and touched his feet seeking his benedictions. The old man with tears of happiness in eyes patted on his back holding both the garland and walking stick together! He exclaimed: "Rama dear, really you are great! You have brought a name and fame not only to yourself but also to the entire clan. I am really proud of you and your achievements. May God bless you!"....

The knock at the door got louder and louder and with that knock Rama Kamati was awakened both from the slumber and the strange dream. He got up from the bed, went to the door and opened. The watchman of the rest-house had knocked at the door to wake him up as desired by him previous night. Wishing him, "Good-morning!" he left.

Rama Kamati closing the door came back and sat on the bed trying to recollect all that was seen and experienced in the dream. What was the message of this strange dream? He thought for a long time and at the end felt that the message was very clear. There would be hurdles in his life but by the grace of the Almighty God he would be able to fight them out successfully. Then he would earn the gratitude, honour, respect and love of not only the rulers but also of his kith and kin. But

throughout his life, like a commander of the army he should be careful and vigilant to meet the danger and threat that might come any time from any quarters.....

He washed the horse, gave gram to eat and after going through the ablutions and other morning duties, went to the dining hall. The cook served him with a sumptuous and heavy breakfast besides giving him a lunch packet to eat on the way.

After this he sat waiting for the receptionist to bring the letter meant for Bombay Castle.

The receptionist appeared in time carrying two envelopes. He showed Rama Kamati the first one closed and sealed and said, "Upon your reaching Bombay this should be handed over personally to our Deputy Governor, Honourable Cooke to whom it is addressed.After handing over he proffered another envelope but an open one stating: "This is the copy of the letter addressed to the Deputy Governor. You can preserve this copy for posterity. Generation after generation in your family should derive inspiration, pride and pleasure on reading this!"

"Really?" Rama Kamati was surprised.

"Yes!" The receptionist declared: "I learn the Honourable President Harris himself has drafted this letter of commendation. Can I read out for you?" He took out the copy of the letter and read out loudly:

"On the Island is honest Ramajee Comattee, an old trusty servant of the Rt. Hon. Company, and one that has stood by them on the Island all the Warrs and has been very assisting on all occasions, not only in procuring men but encouraging them to fight the enimy & c. He is one the Generall had a great esteeme of for his good services, and knowing him to be a great sufferer by the Warr, promised him encouragement but we need not tell you this, supposeing you know him better then most of us. But those that know him give him a very good character, Wee desire you will give us your opinion about him, and after discourse with him advize us what you think wee ought in charity and honour to doe for one that deserves soe well as he ; for his oarts & c. Wee hear were cutt and spoyled because of his serveing us."

Dated at Surat this the 30th day of June one thousand six hundred and ninety." (sic)

Really it was a great letter and hearing the contents Rama Kamati's joy knew no bounds. He closed his eyes for a while and remembered both his family deity and the guardian deity of Bombay gratefully and received the copy of the letter as though a great reward for all the suffering he had undergone and all the sacrifices he had made.

"Well, Mr Kamati!" The receptionist declared: "I have one more pleasant duty to perform." With this he handed over two packets of sweets: " This is from the Honourable President Mr Harris himself with his good wishes to your wife and children." Receiving the packets Rama Kamati thanked him and said, "Please convey the Honourable President that I did not find any words to express my gratitude and joy. I can only assure my sincere, honest and loyal service at all times." With these words he got on the back of his horse. The receptionist followed him up to the gate where Rama Kamati halted for a while and looked back to take leave. The receptionist waved his hands cordially and wished: "Good luck, Mr Kamati. Pleasant journey! Good Bye!"

"Thank you, and Bye!" Rama Kamati waved back acknowledging the good wishes and with that he resumed the return journey greatly enthused and encouraged.

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17. THE MUSTER MASTER GENERAL

At noon the next day -

At Vasai it was a pleasant surprise to Lolla Kamati when he saw his elder brother, Rama Kamati alight from the back of the horse in front of his shop.

To receive him, immediately he ran, touched his feet, embraced and enquired eagerly: "Elder brother, how are you?"

Rama Kamati patted his younger brother on the back and said, "I am fine. By the by, how are you, Lolla?"

"I am doing fine." He then apologetically said, "Elder brother, I wanted to come down to Bombay to see you. We were really worried when we heard that you were seriously injured in the battle against the Siddis."

"That is an old story!" Rama Kamati consoled: "In fact Siddi's men never caused any harm. It was our own mortar that failed and resulted in an explosion. It was purely an accident and I was luckily saved."

"Soon after getting the news, I wanted to rush to Bombay." Lolla Kamati explained,"But I came to know that Siddi's men never permitted anyone to enter Bombay from any entry point."

"Yes!" Affirmed Rama Kamati, "Bombay spent sixteen long months in nightmares. Fortunately Moghul Emperor Aurangazeb was kind to Bombay. In a rare gesture of goodwill he levied a fine of Rs.1,50,000/- and asked his Admiral Siddi Yakut Khan to hand over the peaceful possession to the English. On the 20th June, Siddi Yakut Khan left the shores of Bombay. Since then we have the freedom to move about any where we like. That is how I am here now."

"How is the business in Bombay?" Lolla Kamati wanted to know.

"What business?" Scornfully said Rama Kamati: "Bombay is ruined. It may take years to rebuild. Except half a mile to the south of the Castle and the Bazar, everything else was under Siddi's control. He looted, plundered, destroyed and butchered people. For the last sixteen months there is no farming, no gardening, no fishing and no trading. Bombay has some how survived the onslaught perhaps by the grace of Goddess Mumbadevi."

"But how is your business, elder brother?" Lolla Kamati eagerly asked again.

In reply Rama Kamati sadly smiled: " When the whole city is ruined how could I be an exception? At the beginning of the hostilities itself, I had placed all the resources at my command for the disposal of the authorities and now I have become a bankrupt."

"Bankrupt?" Lolla Kamati became speechless for a while, unbelieving: " Then things must be in a very bad shape. I never knew it."

"Very bad, brother! Really very bad!" Rama Kamati sighed deeply: "Let me talk to you everything in detail later. Now let us go to your house. I want to have a wash and change. I am on the way back from Surat!"

" Surat?" Lolla Kamati was surpaised. Then he called his servant and asked him to look after the shop till he returned.

Rama Kamati took bath, had food and relaxed on a cot. Lolla Kamati sat on a chair and asked, "Elder brother, would you like to take rest for a while?"

"No!" Rama Kamati laughed: "If I take a nap now I may not be able to reach Bombay even by midnight. I have assured that I will reach Bombay today before the fall of night. Therefore, I shall stretch my legs for a while and then take leave."

"Brother-in-law!" Lolla's wife respectfully requested. "You are visiting after many years. Why can't you stay overnight and go tomorrow?"

"Sorry!" Rama Kamati declined, "If I don't reach today as assured, people at home will grow anxious. More than that, I have a lot of important things to attend. Don't mistake me."

"Then I will not insist you to stay on!" She excused herself and went inside to enable both the brothers to converse.

To his younger brother, Rama Kamati gave a full account of all that had happened since the war broke out and at the end he revealed that he had to sell the ornaments of his wife to rehabilitate himself. He also invited his brother to join him as he was going to start shipping as a new line of business which had tremendous prospects of growth. All that he needed was not the money but the talents and manpower. He also stated that the ships were expected to be in the harbour of Bombay sometime during Dasara.

As he was listening to his elder brother's tales of woes and valour, tragedy and adventure, Lolla's face was brightening up and eyes were twinkling. When Rama Kamati finished his narration Lolla said, "Elder brother, in fact I wanted to meet you and discuss several things including my future. The grocery shop here, though running smoothly

gives me profit just to sustain. With my family growing, after a year or two, this business may not bring in adequate yield. Your offer has come just in time. I will wind up the business and come to Bombay." He was really happy.

"But not right now!" Rama Kamati advised. "Let everything be finalised. I am hopeful of good days after the rainy season. You can close your business only after that." Then he remembered something and asked, "Lolla, I need a good clerk who can keep accounts and also draft and write good letters in Marathi, English and Portuguese. Can you recommend anybody from Vasai?"

"Why?" Lolla asked, "Can you not get somebody in Bombay itself?"

"Bombay?" Rama Kamati laughed: " I have already told you that Siddi Yakut Khan has turned Bombay into a cremation ground. Many people have fled and many more have died."

Lolla thought for a while, remembered something and then said, "Yes, elder brother. I know a young man. Govind is his name. We call him Govindji. His ancestors were from Benares. He knows Sanskrit, Marathi, Konkani, Portuguese and a little bit of English. You can train him to speak and write English. Very honest and trustworthy. Totally reliable. He is on the lookout for a good job. I will talk to him. Before Dasara I can also bring him to you."

"Yes, bring him!" Rama Kamati said, "Also assure him of a good pay and living accommodation provided he remains loyal throughout."

Lolla obediently nodded his head to say "Yes!"

Thereafter Rama Kamati got himself ready to resume the journey. Before taking leave, he gave one of the two packets to Lolla and said, "Sweets from Surat. The President of the Company has gifted. Give it to your children." Lolla gratefully received.

As he took leave, saying "See you again." Lolla, his wife and children touched his feet and sought blessings. Then all of them waved their hands as the horse started trotting. Waving back affectionately, Rama Kamati gave a signal to the horse to gallop and obeying, the horse sped away.

Around eight o' clock at night Rama Kamati reached Bombay. Although he was away barely for a week, while entering, everything looked new and strange as though he was visiting this city for the first time. Instead of going home, he went to his temple, offered a thanksgiving prayer for the success of his mission, received 'prasadam' and went home.

The doors were wide open and in the hall, his wife and sons were waiting for his arrival. As soon as he entered she stood up with her usual bright smile to receive and the youngest son ran to hug him at his legs.

"How was the jouney?" She asked affectionately: "Would you like to take a glass of milk before wash?"

He smiled: " The journey was very pleasant and before you get me a glass of milk, let me distribute the sweets." He opened the packet and said, "These sweets have come as a gift from the President of the Council to the wife and children of the great Rama Kamati. What do you think of me?"

"Really?" She asked, unbelieving.

"Now obey my command!" He ordered his wife as though he was the commander of the army: " Close your eyes and open your mouth."

She obediently closed her eyes and opened her mouth. He dramatically put a sweet in her mouth and said, "Now open your eyes!"

She opened her eyes and with the sweet still in mouth she pretended to be angry and shouted, "What is this romance, that too by a father of three children in the very presence of everybody!"

Rama Kamati heartily laughed and handed over the packet to his eldest son and instructed, " Now all the three - you trinity - take this packet in and after giving some to the servants share the balance equally. I have a lot of things to tell your mother and don't disturb when we talk. Understand?" The boys obeyed and went in.

"What happened in Surat?" His wife was eager to know. Rama Kamati majestically took out the copy of the letter of commendation and read out.

Hearing, tears of happiness rolled down from her cheeks. "God is

great!" She clasped her hands. "You are duly rewarded for all the troubles taken."

"Wait a minute!" he said. "The story is not over. Please lend me your ears!"

As she wiped the tears, he narrated vividly how he was accorded a hero's reception and how he was assisted in acquiring two large sea-going ships.

"The ships are expected in Bombay harbour during Dasara and I have asked Lolla to join me in business. Closing his business in Vasai he will settle down in Bombay."

"Good!" She welcomed: "More the merrier. Their presence will add strength to us. All along I was feeling alone."

As she was saying this, suddenly she noticed that there was no ring in his finger. While travelling without his knowldge did it fall or what, perhaps he might not be still aware of the loss thought she and asked impatiently. "Dear, did you notice? Your ring is missing!"

Rama Kamati dared not reply. Instantly his tongue and lips went dry. Like a thief he bowed his head down losing all the courage.

"Tell me, please!" She insisted: "Did you lose or ..."

He raised his head and silently stared at her face for a while. Then he took the other packet, opened and showed the gorgeous silk sari - very expensive but at the same time very attractive - and in a whisper he told: " I sold my ring to buy this sari." He proffered to her.

She was overwhelmed. Knowing not what to do she, not receiving it, sat like a doll, dazed. However, after a few silent moments, all of a sudden, to his surprise her eyes brightened up and enthusiastically she received the sari devoutly, examined minutely, stroked softly and then pressed it to her eyes as a mark of great devotion.

As she was still silent without opening her heart, Rama Kamati's curiosity knew no bounds. He wanted to know her feelings at the sale of the ring for the purchase of the sari. Therefore affectionately he asked, "Dear, how do you like the sari?"

"The sari is really good." She appreciated, "But I can't keep it for

myself!"

"Why?" Rama Kamati wondered.

She slowly revealed: "Do you remember that black day? When you were brought home as a wounded warrior with your leg heavily bleeding, I lost all hope in life. At that time all that I could do was to remember Mother Goddess Mumbadevi and crave for her grace for your speedy recovery. Being terribly worried about your limbs, I took a vow that upon your recovery I would make her an offering of the first sari that you would buy for me. As this is the first sari you have bought for me after your recovery, this should legitimately go to the Mother Goddess Mumbadevi. You know that saying 'First to God and then to me?'"

On hearing Rama Kamati was first perplexed, then puzzled and at last deeply moved by her strange vow exhibiting her sincerity, love and affection for him. Yes! Even if he were to lose one limb, life would have become very miserable... But he had still a doubt. When he had brought the sari specially for his wife as a token of his love to her, could the same sari be given as an offering? But his wife clarified that at the spur of the moment that was exactly what she haplessly vowed to do during the crisis and there was nothing wrong in it.

"Initially I was terribly afraid of the war and my heart, out of fear and anxiety used to beat like a drum on hearing even an unimportant tiding relating to the war. But my fear vanished soon after I started praying to Mumbadevi. Therefore now I have to keep up my words of vow!"

"More than that," after a while, she added emphatically, "from the day the war began, everyday, I was praying to Goddess Mumbadevi to protect the dot of kumkum on my forehead, which in other words meant your welfare and safety. Then by offering one single sari to her, if she is pleased; she can bring me a ship load of saris! That being the case, why I should be worried about one sari ? All that we need is her grace and nothing but her grace. Therefore let us go to the temple tomorrow, make the offering wholeheartedly, redeem our pledge and win the grace of the Goddess who has stood by us through our thick and thin. We need her abundant grace in time to come."

Rama Kamati heard his wife very attentively. Was he disappointed? No, not at all. Perhaps Mumbadevi must have arranged the events in that way only to test the devotion of the family to her. Otherwise, while he had declined to buy a sari on the first day when the receptionist had specifically asked, how could he think of purchasing on the second day, that too by disposing of the ring? Then the ring! When every grain of gold in his home was sold how could it escape the attention and how could he notice it only in Surat? And the sari! When it was so beautiful and elegant to be put on during the festivals and auspicious occasions and when any woman with a little liking for the saris would have definitely kept for herself and suggested buying a cheaper one for the deity, how could his wife in the first instance itself decide to dedicate to Mumbadevi as an offering? "Well, I'm sure both of us have passed the test!" Declared he and willingly agreed to make an offering to the deity that had responded to every beck and call of his.

Then with all devotion the next day the silk sari from Surat was offered to Mumbadevi. In their presence, the priest, adorning, put the sari on to the deity to the delight of both Rama Kamati and his wife. On the way back Rama Kamati narrated all about the strange dream he had that night in Surat.

Hearing she laughed it off: "My interpretation of the dream is that Siddi Yakut Khan may not venture to invade Bomaby again and you will have abundant grace of Goddess Mumbadevi in all your ventures and adventures. But be careful and don't be over-confident. After all a dream is a dream taken shape out of your thoughts, wishes and desires and can not be taken as a prophecy."

Exchanging frank views and opinions like this Rama Kamati and his wife returned home with a sense of satisfaction and contentment.

Rains came and then went away as usual. The seedlings and saplings in his garden started growing bringing hope and comfort to the agitated mind.

Then came the festival of Dasara and along with it the much awaited ships from Surat. Rama Kamati took his wife and children to the harbour to show them his proud possession. A special puja was offered to the sea-god for the safety of the ships, cargo and crew. The

priest asked Rama Kamati as the owner of the ships to smash a coconut each hitting on the hull of the ships to ward off evil spirits, if any. "I am not the real owner, but only a proxy. The real owner is here." He pointed to his wife who blushed hearing his words. "Then," the priest suggested, "both of you join together and hit." They joyfully held the coconut together and hit hard. It burst into several pieces. They went to the second ship and broke a coconut there also. Then the priest asked, "Now you have to name the ships. Give them good names."

Rama Kamati pondered for a while and then consulted his wife. She whispered: "Let us believe that the ships have come as a blessing from the Mother Goddess. And Bombay is anyway our home-town and mother-land. Please select some good name to suggest these two aspects."

Rama Kamati agreed and announced: "I propose to call the first ship 'Blessing' and the second one 'Bombay Merchant'. After all am I not a Merchant of Bombay?"

Then sweets were distributed to everyone who was present. Yes - Lolla Kamati had arrived in Bombay and Govindji had already started serving as a clerk in Rama Kamati's business in the name of Messrs Ramagee Comagee.

The shipping business prospered and during next two years Rama Kamati repaid the soft loan the East India Company had granted and acquired two more vessels -the Union and the Recovery. In the third year he purchased for his wife gold ornaments much more than what he had sold during the crisis and in the fourth year, beyond his imagination the government of the East India Company recognising his military services and ability, on 23rd June 1694 appointed him for the coveted post of Muster Master General of Hindu soldiers. Then taking into consideration his knowledge of both agriculture and trade, he was simultaneously made Overseer General of the Company for all the revenue income in the Island of Bombay. The work under this post included supervision and control of all the Prabhu Clerks at the village level.

With the appointment as the Muster Master General Rama Kamati's dream to head an army was realised and with a renewed spirit

of service he started serving Bombay and her people.

Upon his getting these two new assignments, he resigned as the Treasury Shroff but the government promptly appointed Lolla Kamati his younger brother, as the Treasury Shroff so as to retain the goodwill of the great name 'Rama Kamati's Treasury!'

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18. A TEMPLE FOR SHIVA

As the Overseer General, Rama Kamati, had to visit all the places in Bombay to supervise the duties of Prabhu Clerks and it was during one of such rounds that he could visit Walukeshwar and meet the residents of the village. The Prabhu Clerk there brought to his notice that the village did not have any income as there were no agricultural activities and the jungle on the Malabar Hills was inhospitable providing shelter to the robbers and other anti-social elements. Even during day time people were afraid of entering the jungle, he reported.

Although it was not far off from the city rarely did Rama Kamati pay a visit to this village. When the priests from Mahim narrated the story of Mahikavati, they had made a mention that the invasion took place when the King had gone to Walukeshwar Temple. After hearing the name of Walukeshwar Rama Kamati wanted to pay a visit but later on he had to give up the idea as by then he learnt that the temple was razed to the ground by the people of some other faith when an invasion of Bombay took place a couple of centuries ago.

"Now tell me where was the temple," Rama Kamati eager to see the ruins asked the Prabhu Clerk.

"I shall show you, sir!" The Clerk took him to the spot where the ruins of the ancient temple-pillars, slabs, steps and stone images broken, defaced and destroyed were lying in a heap. Even though broken, some of them still had intricate and beautiful carvings suggesting the greatness and glory of the temple that stood there long ago. He surveyed the ruins and asked, "Where is the famous 'linga' of Walukeshwar Mahadev?"

The Prabhu Clerk replied, "Sir, I don't know much about this temple. If you permit, I shall call the residents over here. They are all priests and brahmins. Can I call them?"

"Yes!" said Rama Kamati and the Clerk hurriedly left.

The temple was standing on the sea-shore and Rama Kamati could see the waves rolling one after the other to beat the rocky shore unceasingly. The sight of the vast expanse of blue water stretching upto the horizon made him forget the world for a while. Like a small child, wondering, he kept on watching the waves coming one after the other and then going back in the same way.

The Clerk returned with some priests and to draw the attention of Rama Kamati, he called out, "Sir! Sir!"

Rama Kamati turned his head back. A group of eight to ten priests had come to meet him. All of them were wearing loin cloth around waist and towel on shoulder. Their head was neatly shaven but for the long tuft of hair and on their forehead were marks of sandalwood paste.

Rama Kamati joined his palms in salutation and also as a mark of veneration and they in turn clasped their hands as a sign of respect to the Overseer General.

"You are the first ever government official at the senior level to visit us." The eldest among them welcomed Rama Kamati.

Rama Kamati smiled: "After all what business does a government official have over here? No agriculture and no trade. I learn, only fifty people reside here."

"But do you go by money alone?" The priest asked: "You know in Bombay there is no place as sacred as Walukeshwar. Look at this tank!" He pointed out to what looked like a pond with thick grass grown around it: " This tank is barely a few feet away from the salty sea-water, yet it has sweet water. As sweet as nectar like the water of the holy River Ganga in Benares. Why should I say Ganga in Benares when Mother Ganga 'herself' flows in this very tank?"

Rama Kamati looked at it. It was looking like any other ordinary pond.

"Excuse me!" He politely and respectfully asked: "Did you say it is Ganga over here?"

"Oh, yes!" The priest joined his palms with great reverence: "This tank is called Banaganga. 'Bana' is an arrow in Sanskrit. It has another name - Patalganga. According to a legend, Lord Parashurama wanted to bring Mother Ganga to this place and so from the Sahyadri Mountains, he shot seven arrows of which one brought Mother Ganga here from Patala - the nether worlds. Therefore this is called Banaganga as well as Patalganga."

"Quite interesting!" Rama Kamati appreciated.

"There is one more legend which is more interesting than this!" The priest got encouraged to narrate the other one: "Lord Rama after the abduction of Mother Sita by the wicked demon, Ravana, came to this place accompanied by his brother, Laxman, in search of Sita. It was noon when he arrived. The heat was unbearable and he was very thirsty. But there was not a single drop of drinking water available, though in front was roaring the mighty blue water."

"Do you know?" Rama Kamati asked interrupting: "My name is Rama and I am also thirsty."

He was really thirsty.

"Sorry, sir! Very sorry,indeed!" The Prabhu Clerk apologised: "I should have offered you drinking water as soon as you arrived here. I beg to be excused." He ran to fetch a tumbler of water and a glass.

Rama Kamati drank water, wiped his mouth and requested, "Now please go ahead with the story."

The priest continued the narration, "Without waiting, Lord Rama took his bow, gave a twang and shot an arrow. The arrow pierced the ground, went direct to Patala and brought a stream of River Ganga, in a fountain. Lord Rama drank water to his heart's content and then thought of allowing the fountain to form a lake to remain here for posterity to mark his visit to this place. Since that moment Banaganga is here."

"Very interesting!" Rama Kamati liked the legend. "I never thought that Bombay had links with Ramayan also."

"The story is not over." The priest said, "What I have told so far is only the first part. Now let me tell you the second part." He continued: "You might have heard the name of the famous sage Gautama. His hermitage was here and Lord Rama called on the sage during his visit. The sage received both the brothers warmly. When he came to know about the abduction of Mother Sita he was very sad and suggested that Lord Rama should worship Lord Shiva to get back his wife. Lord Rama at once asked his younger brother Laxman to go to Kashi, and fetch a 'linga'. Laxman instantly left for Kashi but the sage suggested that instead of waiting till Laxman came back, Lord Rama could make a 'linga' of sand and immediately, start worshipping. Accordingly, Lord Rama shaped a 'linga' of sand and started the worship. Pleased with his prayers, Lord Shiva appeared and pronounced that all his desires would be fulfilled before long. Even though it was a 'linga' of sand (and sand is called 'Waluka' in Sanskrit) Lord Shiva was pleased to grace and so the 'linga' was called Walukeshwar.

"After sometime Laxman came back from Kashi with a sacred 'linga' which was also consecreted next to Walukeshwar and that 'linga' was called Laxmaneshwar. Thus there were two 'lingas' in the temple over here. One of the kings of Shilahara dynasty constructed a very beautiful temple for these two 'lingas', with a large temple tank, Banaganga in front. The temple was considered a great architectural wonder in Bombay with magnificent carvings. It had a very high tower with a flag atop visible to the ships even in the mid-sea. Those days, this place was thronged by people coming on pilgrimage even from the distant lands of Malabar. Therefore the hills here were called the Malabar Hills. Then just as an individual has ups and downs in his fortune, this place also witnessed a downfall. Bombay was invaded and this great and glorious temple symbolising Bombay's wealth and prosperity was ransacked. On the top of it, it was razed to the ground, never to rise again. They say, the 'linga' of sand, Walukeshwar, leaped into the sea to avert contamination."

"Then where is the other 'linga' Lakshmaneshwar?" Rama Kamati inquisitively asked.

"It is safe!" The priest said,"When they came to know that the invaders were advancing the priests took enough care to hide it at the

bottom of Banaganga tank. Even now it is lying there. Once a year on Shivaratri day we take it out, worship and deposit again securely there."

"Even now?" Rama Kamati wondered, "Are you still afraid of danger to Shiva?"

"No danger!" The priest told openly: "By His grace we anticipate no danger. But where is the temple for Him ? We are all penniless priests living on paltry income just sufficient to keep our body and soul together. Then in the days of yore kings were constructing temples and giving grants and gifts for the maintenance and daily worship of the deity. We do not think that in the near future Bombay will come under the sway of any Hindu ruler. In fact there is a prediction that so long as the Walukeshwar temple is in ruins, Bombay will never prosper and the people of Bombay - they will always face one calamity or the other. But who can tell all this to the present rulers, who belong to a different faith?"

Rama Kamati, thought, considered, pondered and hesitated for a while. Then he took courage and inquired, "Venerable ones, tell me frankly, if a temple for Shiva is erected, will the difficulties of Bombay be over and people, prosper?"

"I think, yes!" The priest was very confident. "If not this generation, the next generation or the generation next to that. You have just now heard, how Shiva was pleased even with a 'linga' shaped out of sand."

"Then," Rama Kamati announced: " So long as Rama Kamati is alive there is no need for any king to come and build a temple. If my Bombay and her people are going to be blessed, let me reconstruct the temple and give a new look to this tank. I shall widen, deepen and make it longer to look exactly like a river so that our Banaganga would really look like holy Ganga in the distant lands."

The priests stood like statues, unbelieving, their mouth fell open but in the next instant, they were thrilled that the ancient temple would be reconstructed. They chanted a few mantras praising Lord Shiva and then blessed Rama Kamati profusely, again with the chanting of mantras.

Rama Kamati closed his eyes, remembered his family deity Lord Venkataramana for a while and offered silent prayers to grace him with

more health and strength to perform many more great and noble deeds like this....

Thus in the year 1703, Walukeshwar temple and the Banaganga tank were rebuilt by Rama Kamati bearing all the expenses and at the consecration ceremoney he whole-heartedly dedicated the temple for the welfare of the people of Bombay for all time to come.

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19. NEW TROUBLES IN THE SEA

Time was racing. Day was changing into night and night into day so rapidly that it was looking as if within a twinkle of an eye, the dawn would convert itself into dusk and dusk into dawn. Months galloped, seasons changed and year after year rolled by.

The year was 1715 and Rama Kamati though was sixty five, now looked hale, hearty and young without a single grey hair in sight. He had now reached the height of popularity and glory and 'Rama Kamati' had become a household name in Bombay. Regarded as a living legend with many accomplishments to his credit, even at the level of government he remained as an indispensible personality in every sphere of activity.

But personally he lost his well-wisher the old diplomat Narayan Shenoy and in 1702 his younger brother Lolla Kamati the Treasury Shroff. When he was recovering from their death another shock, a bigger one this time completely made him a broke. Yes! Rama Kamati lost his wife - the true life-partner, who stood by him as the angel of his heart, the goddess of his wealth and the deity of his victory. He took a long time to come out of the grief. The responsible position of the Overseer General and the Muster Master General he was holding, somehow kept him busy when he would try to forget the irreparable loss. At home his children had grown up, married and they too had offspring. Financially he was well off not only to maintain a big family but also to contribute liberally to any good cause by way subscriptions and donations for a mere asking.

Although employed, he was still running the business and the same Clerk Govindji, winning Rama Kamati's fullest confidence now designated as Secretary was almost in charge of everything. In-between Rama Kamati had made friends with quite a few people and Dulba Bhandary, a noted farmer and merchant of Mahim had become a very close friend. For his sons, Rama Kamati was giving bids to acquire on lease or rent, estates owned by the government, which included paddy fields, tobacco farms, coconut gardens and arrack farms. Since his bids were of the highest value, he used to get everything much to the discontent and resentment of the other bidders. At one point of time he gave up arrack farming as soon as he came to know that consumption of arrack was against the injunction of the religion. When he came to know that others were resenting his high bids he stopped bidding but those who secured the estates were unable to run profitably and both the government and the bidders thereby lost heavily. Rama Kamati well-versed in agriculture activities was asked by the government to manage again and he did it very successfully.

The year 1713 witnessed another calamity. Bombay was growing rapidly but its food production was not keeping pace with the growth. Therefore it had to depend on the supply of food grains from outside, especially from Portuguese territories beyond Mahim. The Portuguese, prohibited export of rice from their territory to Bombay. Therefore there was an acute shortage and the price of rice soared very high - beyond the reach of the commoners. So people started fleeing and there was a large scale emigration from Bombay. Rama Kamati persuaded people not to leave Bombay. He distributed freely all that he had in his godown and then sought the assistance of the government who at his request released fifty 'morahs' of rice from their stock to be sold at a very reasonable price to the poor and needy. Thus in every sphere Rama Kamati was acting as a saviour whenever there was a catastrophe.

Bombay was growing and with its growth, numerous problems too. But one problem that was assuming an alarming proportion was the rise of the Maratha naval power in the sea around Bombay and down the coastal line of Konkan up to Goa. During his life time, Shivaji Raje himself had strengthened the Maratha navy not only by building and acquiring ships but also by constructing strong forts and fortresses along

the coast. The fortress at Khandheri was one such citadel very close to the harbour of Bombay not relished by the English for a long time. They often felt that unless they acquired Khanderi by hook or crook their supremacy in the Arabian sea, at least around Bombay, would not be recognised.

Yes, English by then were regarded as a naval power worthy of recognition. Their ships were stronger and their guns were more powerful and sophisticated than the others. Side by side, the once dreaded Siddis were on the decline and the Portuguese after ceding Bombay to the English were more or less concentrating in Goa though they had the territory to the north of Mahim with the headquarters in Bassein. The English would have grown by leaps and bounds but were held in check, or rather held back in anxiety and fear by a rising star in the Maratha horizon named Kanhoji Angrey. He became the admiral of the Maratha fleet in 1698 and thereafter he grew from strength to strength never to look back or to retrace the steps once taken. Undaunted by the upheavels in the mainland or the persons occupying the Maratha throne he was always loyal to the seat of the Maratha power. Soon after he took charge as the Admiral, he declared that the coastal line of Konkan fell in the territory of the great Marathas and all the ships and sea-going vessels that desired to enter the Maratha territory should buy his passes paying the requisite fees. In return his navy would afford full protection to them. In the case of a challenge or a violation of his law of the sea, the ships and the goods were liable for confiscation and the captain and the crew of such ships would be held as hostages till the ransom asked for by him was paid.

Kanhoji Angrey had developed a new strategy of naval attack. While the warships of the English and the Portuguese were huge, his ships were small-might very well be called boats with a better manoeuvrability. From any side they were capable of hitting and then running and disappearing in the mouth of rivers and creeks which the bigger ships of the foreign powers could never do sheerly out of their size. With this hit and run tactics they could render any ship disabled and capture easily. Once a ship was seized, Kanhoji Angrey's men would remove the guns and other arms from the ship besides the valuable cargo and keep for themselves before restoring the ship to the owners causing

a considerable loss and damage. As a result of this Kanhoji Angrey's name started striking terror in the minds of the ship owners and traders and so the sea-borne trade in Bombay was badly hit.

The English were careful in avoiding a head-on collision with Kanhoji Angrey's fleet. Yet on the fourth day of November 1712, they received the first ever blow - a very severe one - from Kanhoji Angrey. The East India Company's Governor of Karwar, Mr. Chown was returning to Bombay from Karwar with his pregnant wife and Kanhoji Angrey's men attacked his ship in the vicinity of Bombay harbour. In the battle, Mr Chown's hand was chopped off and in his wife's arms he died of excessive bleeding in the absence of proper medical aid. His wife and other travellers in the ship were then taken prisoners and carried off to the fortress of Khanderi.

This incident took place on the fourth of November but the administration in Bombay came to know about it only after three weeks after getting a letter from Mrs Chown giving the full details of the attack and imprisonment thereafter. In that letter, she had also appealed to the Governor of Bombay to rescue from the tyranny of imprisonment that too when she was pregnant. The other prisoners also had made appeals to secure their release as early as possible.

The news first sent the shock waves and then the waves of sympathy across Bombay. Everyone felt pity for the pregnant lady. Hectic diplomatic activities started at the level of the government to secure her immediate release and then to beg, buy or borrow an enduring peace with Kanhoji Angrey. Rumours came in that Kanhoji Angrey was willing to release the prisoners for a ransom of Rs. 30000/- and also would like to have a peace treaty with Bombay.

The Government of Bombay was in two minds, whether or not to pay the ransom. But the general public lost no time. A subscription list was prepared and it came to Rama Kamati for the initial contribution. He obliged without any hesitation with a substantial sum to inspire others to contribute. All the well-to-do gentlemen of Bombay appreciated the move and within a short time the required sum was collected and passed on to the government.

In the month of February, 1713 an understanding was reached

with Kanhoji Angrey. The main articles laid down that Kanhoji Angrey would not attack English ships and also the ships owned by the people residing in their territory provided they hoisted English flags. They could also call at the ports under Kanhoji Angrey's control and a similar treatment should be given to the ships of Kanhoji Angrey and his people.

Contrary to the rumours Kanhoji Angrey showed magnanimity in releasing the preganant lady, the centre of everybody's attention, unconditionally but the others of course after receiving the ransom placed before him.

People of Bombay heaved a sigh of relief thinking that Kanhoji Angrey would not haunt Bombay harbour again but their belief was shortlived and hope was shattered away because, after two years, Kanhoji Angrey's navy again started harassing both the incoming and outgoing ships from Bombay, with the pretext that the English were playing tricks by allowing everyone to hoist their flags irrespective of the ownership or the place of origin.

Thus the frequent frictions in the high seas had a telling effect on the trade and again the people in Bombay started feeling insecure. The English openly started branding Kanhoji Angrey as a pirate and a land-shark, while the commoners started feeling nervous and panicky even at the slightest rumour of Kanhoji Angrey's ships being sighted at the distant horizon.

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20. NEW GOVERNOR ARRIVES

Report after report went to England about the safety of Bombay in the light of Kanhoji Angrey's threat assuming greater and greater magnitude and after serious deliberations at the headquarters in England, the East India Company thought it fit to appoint Mr. Charles Boone, a rough, tough and a strong man to preside over the affairs of the Company in Bombay. He was commissioned on the Sixteenth March,

1715 both from the British Crown and also the Company as the President of the Castle and Island of Bombay, Governor and Commander in Chief of all the United Company's Forces, on the coast of India, Persia and Arabia. Before he had left England in April, 1715, he was properly briefed about Kanhoji Angrey's exploits so that he could take all possible steps to safeguard the interest of his masters.

The ship, the Stanhope, carrying the new Governor to his post in Bombay, accompanied by the East India Company's trading ship, the Queen reached Bombay in the month of December.

The Queen touched the shore of Bombay a day earlier - on the day of Christmas - to announce the arrival of the new Governor and on the twenty sixth day, all preparations were made to receive the first ever President of Bombay, Mr. Charles Boone, the Governor. A public holiday was declared and the harbour and Castle were tastefully decorated to welcome the new head of the government. People had already an inkling that the new Governor was very tough - capable of meeting any challenge or handling any situation and with his posting, everyone hoped that Bombay would see better and brighter days, being relieved from the clutches of Kanhoji Angrey who was posing a great threat to the very existence of Bombay's trade and commerce carried through her prized harbour and silvery seas.

Well, on the day of his arrival - as soon as people could catch the sight of the Stanhope sailing majestically closer and closer to the harbour, people sent out joyous shouts of welcome to the new Governor and cannons boomed sending out shot after shot saluting their new commander.

The Stanhope slowly touched the dock and lowered its anchor and getting down from the ship by a small ladder was the tall, strong and well-built Governor, Mr. Charles Boone in the navy uniform - all white with a grand navy cap. Instantly a roll of the red carpet was spread out before him, with the military band playing the welcome song with all cordiality. On both sides of the carpet were people and people waving their hands joyfully welcoming him. Waving his hands, he accepted the greetings smiling cheerfully. At the end of the carpet was waiting the official horse-carriage again beautifully painted and decorated befitting the occasion and the two white horses that were yoked to the carriage had on their back a cloth cover with beautiful and glittering embroidery work.

Before boarding the carriage the Governor stood for a while, looked round and again waved back at the people to take leave. As soon as he boarded, the cannons boomed and the carriage sped away towards the Castle where people in throngs had assembled to greet and have a glimpse of their new Governor. At the sight of people, the Governor stood up, waved hands and smiled till he reached the gates of the Castle. The carriage went straight towards the Council Hall of the Castle and then halted at the entrance. As he got down the officials occupying high positions in the government welcomed him, the English saluting and shaking hands and the natives garlanding, clasping hands and bowing. The Secretary introduced everyone praising their services to the Government of the East India Company. Rama Kamati had carried a garland of red roses. As he garlanded, the Secretary introducing said, "Your Excellency, this is Mr. Rama Kamati, a very trusted servant!"

On hearing, Governor Boone, thought for a while remembered something and then heartily smiled, "Mr. Rama Kamati - yes. Before my departure in England itself I had heard about you, Mr. Kamati. The Honourable East India Company is full of appreciation for your yeoman's service to Bombay. Please keep up. I need the support and help of loyal persons like you."

Hearing the words of compliments, Rama Kamati's face beamed with happiness: "Your Excellency, you can always count on me for any service, anytime. Absolutely there should be no hesitation." He assured the Governor of his sincere and loyal service at all times.

After the introduction, the Governor entered the hall packed with the prominent citizens of Bombay.

As soon as the Governor's arrival was officially announced, every one stood up, clapped hands in an applause to welcome and after he took his seat on the high seat, every one sat down. There was a very brief welcome speech by the Secretary and two of the citizens, who in their welcome address referred to the atrocities by Kanhoji Angrey and appealed to the Governor to take steps to stop the oppression. They assured full co-operation to him in his endeavours to hold Kanhoji Angrey in check. They concluded their address stating that the situation in Bombay was really grim needing immediate attention to be followed by

a stern action against Kanhoji Angrey.

The Governor listened to their words with rapt attention but gave not his mind either by an impression on the face or by an expression through the words of mouth. He thanked the people of Bombay for the warmth with which they gave a rousing welcome. Then he abruptly concluded his address declaring that he believed not in words but in action and he meant business and nothing but business.

With this the welcome ceremony was over and the new Governor retired to his residence in the Castle.

"How is the new Governor?" His sons eagerly asked Rama Kamati on his return home.

"Handsome and strong!" Taking off his turban, Rama Kamati remarked. "Looking better than the past Governor who was very ineffective."

"Really?" The sons asked hoping for better days for Bombay.

"Yes!" He smiled. "When I was introduced to him he disclosed that the bosses of the Company have full appreciation for my sincere and loyal service."

The sons were happy. They felt that the Governor's words of appreciation would definitely instill enthusiasm in their father who after the demise of their mother was looking more and more detached, morose and indifferent towards everything in life.

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21. SINK OR SEIZE

True! The new Governor Charles Boone meant business. From the very next day of his assuming the office, he invited for discussion one by one the top-most officers in the Government. He dwelt on only one subject: How to bring about all round progress in the City and Island of Bombay.

When it came to Rama Kamati's turn to call on, the Governor took special interest because by then he had come to know from the official records as well as the reports from others that he was serving the East India Company with unshaken loyalty. He also came to know that for him, serving the government meant serving with all sincerity the city and people of Bombay.

As an unusual gesture of goodwill and friendship, as soon as Rama Kamati entered the chamber of the Governor, he stood up and received him with great warmth and cordiality.

When Rama Kamati bowed and offered his respects, Governor requested him to be seated. Rama Kamati, however, sat down only after the Governor took his seat, as a mark of respect and honour to the authority.

"Well, Mr. Kamati," Boone started the conversation: "The Honourable East India Company relies heavily on loyal servants like you. Now tell me, are you happy with your salary?"

Rama Kamati smiled: "Your Excellency, to be frank with you, I am not serving for monetary benefits at all. I regard it as a sacred duty to serve my hometown. In fact I have quite a few employees in my trading company where they get the salary almost equal to mine. I have taken up the service as an honour to me and my family."

"Good! I appreciate the spirit." Boone liked his approach. "Now tell me sincerely how can we improve this city in particular and island in general."

Rama Kamati bowed his head down and became thoughtful for a while. Then he raised and asked, "Your Excellency, are we really serious in bringing about the improvement?"

"Why not?" Slightly raising his voice the Governor authoritatively asked.

"Excuse me!" Rama Kamati plainly told: "Bombay is the best city in the whole of Western India to-day. It has its own administration, a good natural harbour, a rich and vast hinterland and above all its inhabitants are industrious, hard-working and peace-loving."

"Yes - I agree!" The Governor interrupted: "I could see it from the

moment I landed here."

"But Your Excellency, where is the protection to this city?" Rama Kamati came to the point directly: "Ever since my childhood I have been observing only one thing: Atrocities by way of raids, attacks, invasions and threats by one group of people or the other either from the main-land or from the far-off lands. Long time ago it was the Dutch pirates from Malabar, then Siddis and now it is the turn of Marathas headed by their Navy Admiral Kanhoji Angrey. Therefore, people here have to live in constant fear and danger of attack and invasion. For the last few decades, I have been requesting and suggesting the construction of a wall round the city as a fortification with strong gates so that people can live without any fear or anxiety."

Boone smiled: "I came across with some papers yesterday in which the requests of my predecessors to build a fort have been turned down by the Directors of the Honourable Company. They feel the project is too expensive to be implemented."

"Your Excellency," Rama Kamati respectfully expressed: "The project is definitely expensive. But now Your Excellency has seen personally how dire the need is for such a protection. Bombay is open from all sides and if one so desires, one can attack anytime from any corner and easily gain an upper hand."

The Governor became pensive. Rama Kamati could understand what he was thinking. He slowly said, "Your Excellency, if I am permitted to suggest," he stopped for a while seeking permission from the Governor.

"Go ahead, Mr. Kamati," the Governor encouraged: "After all this meeting is to get to know the things better."

"A tragedy had occured in the high seas." Rama Kamati narrated: "Kanhoji Angrey's men attacked a ship near Bombay harbour. The Governor of Karwar with his pregnant wife was coming down to Bombay by that ship. The Governor's hand was cut off in the attack and he died in the arms of his wife, bleeding. Then all the travellers were taken to Khanderi as prisoners. Everyone in Bombay felt pity for the Governor's wife and to secure her release a lot of efforts had to be made including collection of donations to the extent of Rs.30,000/- to pay off as

ransom."

The Governor looked at Rama Kamati's face meaningfully and stated, "Yes -I am aware of it. I also learn that diplomatically he released her unconditionally and the other prisoners against the ransom. Really, a cunning fellow!"

Rama Kamati told, "I have narrated this incident just to bring to the kind notice of Your Excellency that people of Bombay can rise to any occasion if a simple signal is given."

"That means, we can build a fort round the city raising public donations and subscriptions. Am I right, Mr. Kamati?" The Governor's eyes shone brightly.

"Yes, Your Excellency!" Rama Kamati nodded his head. "I am willing to gift away a substantial portion of my wealth for building the fort." He volunteered as in the past.

"Then any other suggestions to improve the city?" The Governor wanted to know.

"Yes - Your Excellency," Rama Kamati became serious, "the city needs God's grace and assistance profusely. God is ONE and we human beings belonging to different faiths may call Him 'Allah', 'Christ' or 'Krishna'. Your Excellency must have noticed a half built church not far away from the Castle. Since decades it is in that pathetic state. People often gossip that money collected to construct it has been embezzled by the authorities. Although I belong to a different faith, I feel sad whenever I pass in front of it. After all it is a home to the deity we revere the most. If not the home, a place to offer the prayers."

The Governor was very happy: "Mr. Kamati, I am really happy you said it. For this project, I shall offer my own contribution and collect donations from others. For this we will not collect contributions from native people."

Rama Kamati was glad to hear: "Your Excellency, finally this is a matter of strategic importance. Before we venture out on any expedition let us strengthen our naval fleet. And that way Khanderi, the nearest fort of Kanhoji Angrey is barely ten miles away from here. Any moment we can capture it with a willing band of loyal troops."

The Governor expressed satisfaction and happiness over the meeting. As Rama Kamati took leave, the Governor with all cordiality said, "Mr. Kamati, feel free to drop in any time. The doors of my office are always open to loyal persons like you. There is no need even to knock at the door." He smiled brightly.

Rama Kamati bowed in acknowledgement.

This first meeting with the Governor further strengthened the relationship between Rama Kamati and the Government of East India Company.

As the wall to fortify Bombay city was being built the Governor took care to build warships secretly in Surat and Karwar besides Bombay. And Rama Kamati made much more advance in his career. He virtually became a personal friend of the Governor and it was this closeness that made people around the Governor feel jealous of Rama Kamati and his achievements.

In the month of August, 1717, he could get the control of the customs and the day on which he assumed the office of the Customs Officer he invited the Governor and his Council for a dinner at the Customs House. As an encouragement and recognition of his meritorious service to the Honourable East India Company the Governor, on coming to know his love for horses gave as a gift a beautiful and robust horse and also a very expensive shawl. In between, Rama Kamati was asked to act as a native judge called Vereador to attend to judicial duties also.

While Rama Kamati was thus scaling new heights under the new regime, here on the high seas, Kanhoji Angrey and his men were becoming more and more active, bringing in everyday headache to the Administration of Bombay.

Ship after ship was seized by Kanhoji Angrey and his men and the English not willing to have a direct confrontation went on sending letter after letter protesting his actions. But Kanhoji Angrey being adamant in his approach towards the English paid little heed to their protests.

In the year 1716 he captured four Indian ships carrying the flag of the East India Company and at the end of the same year, he seized a huge

vessel call 'The Success' belonging to one Mr. Gordhan Das, a broker of the East India Company at Surat but flying the English standard. The Administration of Bombay demanded the release of the ship immediately claiming that it belonged to them. But as usual Kanhoji Angrey turned deaf ears to the pleas of the owner and the protests of the rulers of Bombay. He insisted that unless a handsome amount was paid over, the ship would not be released. The English deputed one Captain Henry Cornwall as a special messenger to Kanhoji Angrey with one more letter of protest. However, he was secretly advised to supervise and monitor the negotiation by the owner of the ship, Mr. Gordhan Das with Kanhoji Angrey to secure the release. As the negotiations were in progress, news came in that few more ships belonging to the East India Company itself were seized by Kanhoji Angrey's men in gross violation of the treaty. The Governor took this incident very seriously and now an encounter with Kanhoji Angrey seemed imminent. Hectic preparations got under way for an expedition and the Governor gave orders to seize or sink all the ships belonging to Kanhoji Angrey, with the sole aim of humiliating and crushing by hook or crook Kanhoji Angrey.

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22. THE COW AND THE JUDGE

The year 1718 dawned. And in the month of January during the second week one day -

Rama Kamati had gone to the Mint to supervise a special coinage, and suddenly his second son, Durga Kamati came to the Mint running. His body was wet with sweat, his face, pale with anxiety and his breath deep with exhaustion on account of running.

As soon as he saw his father Rama Kamati, he burst into tears and knowing not what the matter was, Rama Kamati grew anxious. With his throat still choking, Durga reported in broken words, "Father, we are undone! We are undone! Our Ganga is lying in a pool of blood with her head severed from body!"

Hearing Rama Kamati became dumbfounded. He stood like a

statue. Workers in the Mint, hearing Durga's sobs rallied round eagerly and asked, "Sir, what's the matter? Can we help you in anyway?"

Rama Kamati was very sad. He slowly revealed, "Somebody has killed my cow - Ganga. Durga is here to convey me the sad tidings."

"Your cow?" They were amazed: "How do they dare to kill a cow in the broad daylight? Certainly somebody must have done this mischief to take revenge."

"Friends!" Rama Kamati sadly acknowledged: "You are right. Everytime when I hear the news of killing of a cow, I am rushing to the Governor to request him to do something to stop the killing of innocent cows as we hold the cow in the same esteem that we hold in our mother. The cow is more sacred to us than anything else on this earth. Really it is a pity that people in power fail to understand our sentiments. Perhaps somebody wants to test my patience or throw an open challenge to my crusade against the cow slaughter in Bombay." His voice choked.

"Sir, what are you going to do now?" They eagerly asked.

'For my own cow I will not go to the Governor." A dejected Rama Kamati desperately said.

"But father," Durga revealed wiping his tears: "Elder brother Babu has already lodged a police complaint and they are searching for him."

"Searching for whom?" An astonished Rama Kamati asked.

"Father," Durga revealed further, "they say, it is Antonio D'Costa, one of the marines of Captain Jonathan Stanton that has killed our cow. There are eye-witnesses."

Hearing the name Captain Stanton, Rama Kamati became thoughtful. Beef was scarce in Bombay while the English were fond of it. Therefore they were asking secretly their servants to kill stray cattle and bring the meat. Antonio D'Costa must have definitely slaughtered the cow to please his master caring little to know to whom the cow belonged. Anyway it was a bad omen for Rama Kamati and his family. At the beginning of the new year iteself they lost one of their favourite cows, that was being revered and loved by everyone in the family. Did the incident occur to forewarn any forthcoming tragedy? Rama Kamati shuddered to think of it because within the next three to four months he

was planning to celebrate, the wedding of his grand- daughter - Purusha's daughter with the son of Gharu Shenoy, a merchant of Rajapur, and in the meantime who could go against the Captain who was the Commander of the English armed forces? He decided to keep quiet and allow the things to take their own shape. But the news of killing the cow of Rama Kamati spread like a wild fire in Bombay.

The next day Antonio D'Costa was arrested and produced before the Chief Justice of Bombay. His Worshipful Lawrence Parker immediately ordered that the culprit should be put behind the bars till the case was decided.

But Captain Stanton!

He ran to the Governor and appealed for the release of his marine. He had a reason. He stated that Antonio D'Costa being a marine should be tried in a military court and not in a civilian court. The Governor agreed and ordered that Antonio should be released forthwith and handed over to the military. But the Chief Justice did not agree. Since the episode had created a sensation in the city, he wanted that the trial should be conducted by himself so that the confidence of people in the system of justice in the city would not be shaken.

By then the Governor had to leave for Surat as scheduled earlier and so he left with the Secretary instructions to the Chief Justice for an immediate release of Antonio D'Costa as a matter of priciple that the military men be tried only by military courts.

But the Chief Justice again disagreed with that view. The trial took place. People requested Rama Kamati to get some witness to enable the judges to decide but Rama Kamati could not get as everyone was afraid of getting involved in a case against the Commander's man. To Rama Kamati's dismay, he lost both the cow and the case!

Fortunately for the family, after the killing of the cow no untoward incident took place though the family had frightfully anticipated one.

Like this the days passed and slowly and slowly, Rama Kamati and the members of his family started forgetting that fateful incident.

On the twenty fifth day of March 1718, when the first Court of Judicature was opened with a bench of ten justices Rama Kamati who

was earlier acting as a Vereador performing judicial duties, was appointed as the first among the four native justices. He took his seat as the justice on the same day at a public ceremony and the Chief Justice of Bombay Mr. Lawrence Parker in his inaugural address expressed that it was a rare honour for the new court to have as a justice an upright person like Rama Kamati well-known for his unquestionable integrity and unflinching loyalty. With this the family felt that God was still kind to them.

Month of April came and with that Rama Kamati's grand daughter's wedding as planned. The marriage party started from Rajapur by a big country-craft owned by Gharu Shenoy -the bridegroom's father. But on the way near Khanderi, Kanhoji's men intercepted and demanded the usual fees. Although Gharu Shenoy pleaded that he was taking a marriage party to Bombay with the bridegroom, the sea-lord did not care and took the craft straight to Khanderi!

The news of this harassment reached Bombay. Everyone was not only taken aback but also grew anxious as elaborate arrangements were already made for the wedding ceremony. The safety of the marriage party became everybody's concern. Rama Kamati knowing not what to do, first prayed to the family deity for the safety of the marriage party and then ran to the Castle to seek the Governor's help.

"Tell me, Mr. Kamati," The Governor was willing to render any help, "when you have been ably assisting the government in every respect over the years, now it is our duty to help you. Please do not hesitate."

Rama Kamati requested: "Your Excellency, it is enough if a letter of request from Your Honour is addressed to Kanhoji Angrey to release the craft. After all it is a marriage party. Nobody on this earth will bring about an obstruction to a marriage unless people are arch enemies."

The Governor became pensive. He would have preferred to place the entire English navy at the disposal of Rama Kamati to attack Khanderi and get the release of the marriage party instead of taking to pen and paper and write a mild letter seeking a favour. When he openly expressed like this, with folded hands Rama Kamati appealed: "Your Excellency, for the present a letter will do. If that doesn't work then we shall think of other means".....

The Governor smiled, "As you wish!" And then wrote a friendly letter to Kanhoji Angrey to allow the marriage party to proceed to Bombay. Without taking much time the letter was dispatched to Kolaba, the headquarters of Kanhoji Angrey.

The request of the Governor of Bombay was immediately complied with. The marriage party safely arrived in Bombay much to the relief of everyone and Rama Kamati was all happiness. In a week long celebration the marriage was held in great gaiety and pomp and when the bride had left Bombay a boatful of gifts and presents was given by Rama Kamati. It was a rare occasion felt he as he could see the marriage of the third generation of his family during his life-time.

And here at the government level, perhaps that was the only friendly letter ever written by the Governor of Bombay to Kanhoji Angrey as, soon thereafter the hostilities started hotting up and on the Seventeenth day of June, 1718, the government issued a widely publicised proclamation that none of the citizens of Bombay should deal in any manner with Kanhoji Angrey or the people in his territory. With this, along with the clouds of monsoon, the clouds of war started gathering on the City and Island of Bombay and once again anxiety and uncertainty gripped the people. The only consolation was the completion by then of the high wall surrounding the city with strong gates. The gate opposite to Rama Kamati's temple dedicated to Lord Venkataramana was called the Bazar Gate and the gate close to the new church that was coming up near the Castle became Churchgate.

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23. THE CHARIOT FESTIVAL

On the Thirtyfirst day of October 1718, just as Rama Kamati was getting ready to go to his office of Overseer General, he heard a gentle knock at the door. He instantly asked his servant to open the door. On opening the servant saw a messenger from the Castle. At once he enquired, "Is Mr. Rama Kamati in?"

"Yes!" Replied the servant: "He is getting ready to go to the

office."

"I have come from the Castle." The messenger announced, "I have come here with an important letter from His Excellency the Governor."

Hearing Rama Kamati came out and asked, "What's the matter?"

The messenger saluted and handed over an envelope to Rama Kamati. He then said, "Sir, this is from the Governor."

"Very well," Said Rama Kamati receiving the letter.

"Sir, your signature!" The messenger requested him to sign on a piece of paper as an acknowledgement. Rama Kamati instantly obliged. Saluting again the messenger took leave.

Rama Kamati opened and read. It was an order from the Governor asking him to be present in the Council Hall at twelve noon that day. He nodded his head in acceptance and then, after an hour he went to the Castle and entered the Council Hall. There were quite a few high ranking officers both the native and the English who had arrived in obedience to the Governor's orders similar to the one received by Rama Kamati.

Exactly at twelve the guards announced the arrival of the Governor. Everyone stood up and in a moment's time the Governor arrived and sat down on his usual seat on the dais. As soon as he sat down, everyone, bowed his head as a mark of respect and then took the seat. The Secretary as usual went to the dais and announced: "Mr. Rama Kamati."

Rama Kamati at once stood up, bowed his head down and then raised knowing not why his name was called out.

"Your Excellency and Gentlemen," the Secretary continued the announcement: "The Government of the Honourable East India Company is pleased to appoint Mr. Rama Kamati as the Commander of all the native forces in recognition of his meritorious military service."

Welcoming the appointment everyone there including the Governor clapped hands in a grand applause.

But Rama Kamati! It was really a very pleasant surprise as it was one of his great ambitions to become the commander of the army and

today that ambition was fulfilled!

The Secretary requested Rama Kamati to come to the dais and receive the appointment orders personally from the Governor. He then passed on an envelope to the Governor.

Rama Kamati went up to the dais and received the orders with all modesty. After handing over, the Governor gaily shook his hands and wished all success in the new assignment. The people in the audience again clapped their hands.

The Governor requested Rama Kamati to meet him in his chamber as soon as the meeting was over.

Actually after this, there was no other official business to transact and therefore the Secretary called it a day.

Rama Kamati met the Governor in his chamber and they discussed at length many confidential military matters of great importance and in the end, the Governor said, "Mr. Kamati, when we are going out, we leave Bombay under your protection. Please take proper care."

Rama Kamati was fully aware of the responsibility. "Your Excellency need not worry!" Rama Kamati with great confidence stated: "With all my might, I will guard the gates of the city. After all I belong to Bombay and it is my city." He heartily smiled.

"Good!" The Governor was very happy: "We have full confidence in you, Mr. Kamati."

"Thank you very much!" Rama Kamati humbly acknowledged and then wished, "All success to the expedition, Your Excellency."

The Governor smiled and waved his hand happily.

Rama Kamati took leave with his heart swollen with pride. He wanted to reach home to convey his sons that his dream of becoming the Commander was realised. But the next instant he remembered his wife and the memory made him sad. "She should have been alive now." Thought he: "Perhaps she would have jumped for joy on hearing the news. But I am not fortunate."....

With the memory of the departed soul his spirits suddenly sank and instead of going home, he thought of going to Mumbadevi's temple

and seek her grace as he did in the past on getting new assignments. More than that the responsibility seemed greater than before as the Governor himself was planning to lead the expedition.... Therefore he took the pathway leading to Mumbadevi's temple.

He reached the temple and stood before the deity. He had never visited the temple earlier at this hour of the day and today strangely there were no devotees at all. Therefore, very conveniently he could enter and offer his prayers.

Mumbadevi was draped in a colourful sari. Flowers of all hues were adorning her. In the wicker lamp of bright flames her red face was as radiant as ever and her trident at the corner-sharp and shining- was sufficient to reassure again and again all the devotees a safe living in Bombay - the ever prospering and ever growing city under her care and protection.

"Mother," with devotion Rama Kamati, closed eyes, clasped hands and whispered the prayer: "I have come again to your feet seeking your protection and grace. All the native forces are placed under my command but the war will not be fought on the soil of Bombay. I am seeking your divine grace."....

The Mother Goddess did not respond instantly. Again he prayed reverentially repeating the same words.

But there was no response.

The third time Rama Kamati repeated more fervently, his eyes still closed firmly.

And there he could hear the ripples echoing in his heart. Ripples of a smile and then the clear voice: "Son, you are not young now. You should not have accepted the new assignment!"... And the echo abruptly ended!

He waited for sometime expecting that some more words would follow, but no words came and his heart started beating like a drum, as it became clear, that Mumbadevi had not granted approval for the new assignment. He at once felt that all his strength and vigour were gone for ever. With great difficulty he performed a circumambulation and came out of the temple. He suddenly felt exhausted and sat down for a while

on a root of a nearby banyan tree and started looking at the coconut trees swaying slowly in the afternoon breeze. The sun had already started westward journey and for the first time in his life Rama Kamati thought that he had grown old with his strength and stamina on the decline. He remembered the day he had visited the temple with his wife to make the offering of the silk sari brought from Surat. The memory of his wife made him all the more sad. He felt quite alone. "She should have been alive to tender me sound advice in critical moments like this. Oh, how I wish!" Tears appeared in his eyes but he instantly wiped them out. Then he stood up and looking once more at the sun he walked homewards.

His sons were eagerly waiting for his arrival. Without uttering a single word, he sat down on his usual seat and deeply sighed, greatly tired.

The eldest son Babu, went close and anxiously asked, "Father, how was the visit to the Castle? I hope everything went off well."

"Oh, yes!" He smiled but feebly. "All the natives forces are put under my command."

"That is a great news!" All the three sons said in a chorus: "Very great indeed! Father it is a credit to all of us. But why are you looking so tired? Are you all right?" At once Rama Kamati sat straight, tried to regain his confidence and laughed: "From the Castle I had gone to Mumbadevi walking down the distance under the hot sun. I am feeling a little exhausted, that's all!"

Hearing, one of his daughters-in-law immediately ran in and brought a glass of buttermilk. He drank and got himself refreshed.

Then he called his elder son, Babu, to his side and asked: "Babu dear, tell me frankly, have I erred in anyway in accepting this assignment of tremendous responsibility?"

"Why,father?" Babu asked in wonder with his eyes wide open: "Has anyone expressed displeasure?"

"Oh, no. Not at all!" Rama Kamati slowly said: "You know I am not young now. I have grown old and am nearing seventy. Will I be able to shoulder the responsibilities?"

"But, father," Babu tried to convince: "When the rulers have faith

and trust, why do you doubt about your capacity? Then, where is the freedom to decline when you are still in the government service as the Muster Master General and Overseer General? More than that now you are a judge of a superior court."

Yes-where was the freedom or scope for him to express his opinion? The Governor commanded to go over to the Castle and as soon as he reached, the Governor proclaimed him to be the Commander. And was it not his dream to become the Commander? When it came of its own, how could he have second thoughts to curtly decline? But why should Mumbadevi who was inspiring all these years suddenly pointed out that he had grown old?

There was no answer to this question at all.

Babu then suggested: "Father, this is a great occasion deserving to be celebrated in a grand way. But I don't know why are you so worried. Let us offer a special puja to our family deity Lord Venkataramana and pray for His protection. Well, the priest was suggesting that we should start celebrating chariot festival in our temple. I will arrange to get a wooden chariot built up immediately and have a festival to commemorate your promotion to the highest rank in the army any native can think of."

With that suggestion, faith and confidence slowly seemed to be returning to Rama Kamati. He stood up and smiled and silently waved his hand in acknowledgement to all the members of the family who were standing around him to offer their felicitations.

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24. WITCH HUNTING IN BOMBAY.

Although the people at large in the City and Island of Bombay were not aware, preparations were being made round the clock in the Castle and the harbour of Bombay for a military expedition, the destination of which was not made public till Thirty first day of October, 1718.

On the First day of November 1718 the life started very early in the Castle of Bombay and also the harbour, for, on the previous night itself the Governor had ordered that all the warriors and officers chosen for the expedition should assemble in the harbour at the day-break and accordingly everyone in a fighting mood was present, with roaring spirits. Sharp at seven o'clock the General came out of the Castle clad in all white with the captain's cap on his head. With a sword and also a pistol hanging from his waist belt, he walked majestically as the military band played the inspiring notes suggesting the marching of the army.

The Governor took the command, hoisted his flag in the ship called the Addison and led the expedition himself. He gallantly announced that the destination was the island fortress of Khanderi and all should follow the flagship, the Addison.

The island of Khanderi barely ten miles away from Bombay was at the mouth of Bombay harbour. Its length was about a mile and breadth about half a mile and was situated almost midway between Bombay and Kolaba, the headquarters of Kanhoji Angrey.

Kanhoji Angrey had strengthened the fortification of Khanderi three years ago and strategically it was through this out-post that his men used to pounce upon the ships and boats entering the harbour of Bombay. Therefore, the Governor thought it fit to storm the fortress of Khanderi to capture it.

The winds were favourable and so the English fleet with around one thousand strong men reached the vicinity of Khanderi within a few hours. After reaching they spent the evening in devising plans and the next day they lined up all the fighting vessels round the island in a virtual blockade.

The firing began on the Third day of November, much before the

day-break and at the sun-rise, it was noticed that the shells were not reaching the fortress at all. Therefore, the vessels were moved close and thereafter firing continued till the fall of night.

When the English ships were bombarding without any break, the people guarding the fortress showed no signs of a strong rebuttal. They put only three of their guns into action with occasional shots making no impact on the aggressors. Strangely at four o'clock on the first day itself they became quiet and the next day there was absolutely no gun shot from the Khanderi fortress at all. While from this side firing continued unabating even at night.

On noticing that there was no response from the fortress the Commander of the expedition, the Governor, thought that the people inside must have exhausted all their ammunition and were not in a position to defend if landing would take place to crash the gates of the fortress. So on the fifth day in the morning a decision was taken to send two landing parties consisting of three hundred English grenadiers and marines and six hundred native sepoys. But at the nick of time foreseeing some danger the sepoys declined to land. To induce the landing, the Governor, on the spot offered attractive incentives including compensation in the case of mishap to the soldiers who volunteer to land. But only a few came forward.

When the actual landing took place in two places, surprisingly, the guns in the fortress that were quiet, systematically started firing and when the English troops were very close to the walls unexpectedly from the fortress came stones after stones in a grand shower wounding and killing many. There was panic everywhere. Like this after suffering heavily the English were compelled to retreat. Encouraged by the sudden retreat the guns in the fortress which were not three, but now many, uninterruptingly fired and fired very effectively causing a lot of damage to the ships and at the same time inflicting injuries and death in the English camp. The Governor had decided to send landing parties thinking that the fortress had no ammunition and that whatever little they had in stock was already spent. But when the guns were merrily firing now, he drew a conclusion that fresh supplies must have arrived breaching the blockade or somewhere some of his disloyal men must have allowed Kanhoji Angrey's ships in, carrying the replenishments.

Yes-on the first day of attack itself two of Kanhoji Angrey's ships had escaped from the harbour of Khanderi and the English ships, though tried to intercept, could not do so.

On the sixth day one more war-ship joined the English fleet and this boosted the morale of the fighting forces. Again bombardment started and landing was attempted but the defenders were very smart. No invader could go anywhere nearer because of their effective firing with guns supported by the traditional method of keeping the enemy away by showering and pelting stones that were available in large quantities within the fortress itself!

Then the sea-current around the island was equally strong not only to drift the landing boats away but also to capsize some of them, making landing extremely difficult.

The sepoys on the side of the English were throughout reluctant to land, and the English sailors around two thousand in number though readily available on the spot, took a stand that their duties were restricted only to the ships. With this the Governor had no choice but to fire from the ships keeping a safe distance which in fact had no impact at all. On the eighth day, after exhausting a substantial portion of the ammunition, the war council met under the chairmanship of the Governor in the flagship and took a decision to go down up to Kolaba, the headquarters of Kanhoji Angrey and continue the expedition by firing at all his strongholds, with a view to frighten if not capture any of his fort of fortresses!

Thus, spending the major part of the ammunition, the Governor returned to Bombay on the fourteenth day and ten days thereafter the remaining battle ships returned exhausting every bit of ammunition.

Though a complete debacle, the expedition had a solitary effect on Kanhoji Angrey. He offered to hold peace talks inbetween but the offer was rejected outright by the Governor.

And during the bombardment and blockade of Khanderi, the Governor realised that the English army was not as formidable as he had thought. Khanderi fortress as such was ill-equipped with barely three hundred people including women and during the attack the women ably assisted their gallant men to withstand the onslaught by about one

hundred battle ships and around five thousand men encircling the whole of island.

The debacle left a deep and indelible mark on the mind of the Governor. The native sepoys refused to land and storm the fortress, the English sailors declined to attend to duties other than in their ships and such a strong blockade failed to stop Kanhoji Angrey's ships slipping in stealthily with supplies of arms and ammunition to withstand the constant bombardment. Evidently there should be reasons other than the currents of the sea or the high tide, firmly believed the Governor.

When he expressed his feelings like this in the Council Meeting, someone said, Kanhoji Angrey had secret links and dealings with many of the top ranking army officers and also with the prominent citizens of the city and when gallantry was evident in every step taken by the General, treachery must have played a greater role....

As if the real cause for the debacle was found out, the Governor jumped from his seat at once and shouted, "Then why should we delay in bringing the culprits to books? Screen everyone in Bombay and his activities. Traitors must never be allowed to thrive on the golden sands of Bombay. Never be allowed!" His utterances reflected the frustration and fury he had at the back of his mind and from that moment of time witch hunting began in Bombay to the misfortune of many innocent lives.

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25. A CATHEDRAL CAME TO BOMBAY

The uneasiness that had arisen out of the failure of Khanderi expedition was forgotten for a while when it was decided by the Governor to have the formal opening of the English Church on the Christmas Day - the 25th December, 1718.

The Governor had taken a genuine interest in the completion of the construction of the church that was half-finished for a long time. People from all walks of life felt relieved when the construction was over, as earlier it was serving as a sad reminder of the indifference of the

rulers towards their own religion. If they were to neglect their own place of prayer and worship how would they regard the places of worship of others, this was how the citizens of Bombay were talking about when they saw the half-finished construction in the heart of the city, that too near the Town Hall and just outside the walls of the Castle.

The idea of having a church for the English was mooted way back in 1672 when the President of Surat, General Gerald Aungier came down and stayed in the Castle of Bombay. It was this General that was responsible for the rise and growth of Bombay and so he was aptly called the 'real' Governor of Bombay. In fact, he had come down to Bombay with an objective of building a city on the barren rocks and in his own words "the city which by God's assistance is intended to be built."

He modernised and transformed Bombay a mere fishing village into a flourishing model township. He requested people to construct buildings with tiled roofs instead of palm leaves and thatched ones, to withstand fire, flood, storm and heavy rains. He started a law court, a printing press and also a hospital with modern amenities. Coinage in Bombay started during his regime bringing out the first rupee. Benevolent, kind-hearted and a man of vision he had brought about a lot of reforms in the administration including setting up of Panchayats. He assured the fullest freedom of trade and worship and thus earned the admiration of all....

In 1672 a site was chosen for the construction of a church and in 1676 the foundation was laid and the work began. When the walls reached a height of around 15 feet the construction was stopped for want of funds. Dr. Richard Cobbe, the Champlain of Bombay in the year 1715 took up the construction of the church again, with all earnestness and the work of construction re-started. Apart from the support of the general public, the new Governor, Charles Boone also blessed the venture making his own personal contribution in cash.

Well, as soon as the date of opening was finalised invitations were sent out to all the English citizens and the only exception made was in the case of Rama Kamati now a senior citizen and a very prominent person of the city who could not be ignored on any count. His wealth, his influence on the society and above all, his catholic outlook -advocating

that the Almighty God was one and all the religions were nothing but different pathways to reach Him, had by then become proverbial and so the Governor had sent a special messenger to him with a request to be present at the opening ceremony on the 25th night.

Rama Kamati considered the invitation a rare honour. He personally met the Chaplain, Dr. Cobbe the previous day and inquired whether he could make some offering on the opening day. The clergy-man was happy and expressed that all arrangements were duly made with the whole-hearted support of the Englishmen in the city and now nothing remained. Then Rama Kamati of his own, arranged for the decoration with wreaths of flowers, coconut palm-leaves, mango-twigs, banana plants with large bunches of fruits and also the bunches of tender coconuts. Thus the church was gaily decorated in the traditional style of house-warming ceremony, much to the admiration of everyone.

The much awaited opening ceremony was to take place in the night, and Rama Kamati decided to participate with all the members of his family.

At the fall of night, the whole building of the church, illuminated by candles as well as special clay-tray lamps looked glorious and majestic attracting every soul in the city. The military band played a soft and sober music and people in throngs came, saw the church and returned praising the majestic construction, colourful and artistic work on the window and door glasses and the high altar with a tasteful decoration.

Rama Kamati arrived with all the members of his family clad in ceremonial dress. His daughters-in-law had put on gorgeous silk saris and gold ornaments studded with gems and diamonds.

Dr. Cobbe received him with all cordiality and asked him and his people to be seated in a special enclosure meant for the invitees.

Thereafter, the Englishmen came with their families beautifully dressed befitting the great occasion.

The Governor, members of the Council, high ranking military officers and the English merchants and all others reached the main entrance of the church. The Champlain Dr. Cobbe received all of them at the door and repeated the psalm appropriate to the occasion: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up ye everlasting doors."

Strangely by a sheer coincidence a new-born baby was baptised by the name Susanna in the new church.

Then there was a sermon from Isiah and after that a toast was offered by the Governor for the success of the new church. With that the opening ceremony was over.

Although many of the things looked strange and mysterious Rama Kamati watched everything with rapt attention sheerly out of appreciation for the decency and the meticulous care with which the opening ceremony was conducted.

After the toast, at the invitation of the Governor, the English forgetting their ranks, position and status flocked to the Governor's residence in the fort to take part in the mid-night dinner specially hosted by him. Wine and delicious food was available in plenty to the accompaniment of a delightful music. The occasion was regarded so great that from the Castle there was a twentyone gun salute to the church which was endorsed by other European ships in the harbour in quick succession. The gun salute continued up to four o'clock in the morning.

With his family members, Rama Kamati had returned home around two o'clock and soon after the return everyone went to bed.

Rama Kamati too had gone to bed but for a long time no sleep came to him. Minute after minute the cannons in the ships in the harbour had kept on booming and Rama Kamati marvelled at the way in which they were celebrating the event. What were the statues they had installed in the church? He tried to recollect. In fact there was no statue. Only the Holy Cross made of wood painted in red was visible throughout. As he thought of the Holy Cross he remembered the story of Jesus Christ he had heard during his childhood from a Christian padre. Lord Krishna was born in a prison and Jesus Christ a cow-shed. What a great similarity thought he but in the next instant he remembered the barbarous punishment of crucification awarded to Jesus Christ after the treacherous trial and what was the crime committed by him? Preaching non-violence and love? It looked very strange. Why did people not revolt against the cruel judgement and save the innocent Son of God? He could not answer the question. Suddenly he had another thought. What could an innocent person do if he were punished like Jesus Christ

basing on false allegations? For a long time he struggled hard to find an answer but in vain. Thereafter he felt, why should he worry about the injustice to innocent persons when there was not even a single case he could think of or remember? That thought vanished and now another one crept in. "Suppose if I were to face such a situation?" Asked one part of his mind. But promptly replied the other part, "Don't entertain such an inauspicious thought even for a fraction of a second, when you are honest, hard-working, religious and god-fearing. You have not caused any harm to anybody throughout your life so far and so, who can think of troubling you and what for?"

The shots of cannon coming one after the other from the ships in the harbour kept him awake throughout the night and strangely most of the time he kept on thinking about the trial and crucification of Jesus Christ as though he had seen the event with his own eyes just a few hours ago.....

Two days later, the Governor and the Council recorded officially an appreciation for Rama Kamati for attending with devotion the midnight service of the new church.

But Rama Kamati was very modest. He declared: "After all, I participated in the opening ceremony purely out of my devotion to the Almighty God and I don't deserve any appreciation for that."

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26. THE LION IN A TRAP

The month was February and the year was 1720.

On the first Sunday of the month in the morning, as usual Rama Kamati after visiting Lord Venkataramana temple and Mumbadevi's had returned home.

After taking the breakfast he came back to the hall and as he was just taking his seat, he heard someone hurriedly knock at the door. The servant ran to the door, opened and it was Govindji his secretary who had knocked at the door. Govindji rushed in gasping as though chased

by a tiger and stood before Rama Kamati, trembling.

Normally without any invitation Govindji never called on his master Rama Kamati at home and his sudden and unexpected visit brought in a little surprise. Rama Kamati therefore, asked, "Govindji, I hope everything is all right." By then Babu, Durga and Purusha, all the three sons came out of the dining room after breakfast.

Govindji threw quick glances at them and hurriedly told in a visibly shaken voice: "Sir, things do not seem to be all right for us. That is why I came here running." He was looking pale and nervous.

"What's the matter ?" Rama Kamati, cool, calm and composed enquired with his usual air of dignity.

"Sir, just an hour ago some officials from the Castle came to my residence. They showed some papers on which were affixed your personal seals." He stopped the narration for a while, breathed deep and then continued, "They asked whether they were your seals. After verification I have told, 'yes!' "

"Then?" Rama Kamati was eager to know: "What were those papers?"

"Sir, they hid them folding securely and did not show properly." He complained, "All that they wanted to know was whether they were your seals."

Rama Kamati became thoughtful for a while. He took out his gold ring from his finger, looked fixedly and then showed to Govindji.

"Were those marks looking exactly like this?" He asked.

Govindji took the ring, closely examined and gave back: "Exactly the same."

"But what were those papers?"

"Sir!" Govindji confessed: "They never showed me the written portion of the papers, cleverly folding it. Inspite of my asking, they never revealed."....With perspiration appearing on his forehead he was looking more and more worried.

"Govindji," Rama Kamati assured him, "it looks you are terribly nervous and worried. Please be seated and let us find out what those

papers could be. By the by I have not made use of my personal seal at least during last five years." Then he looked at his son, Babu and said, "Ask the servant to get a glass of milk and something to eat. Let Govindji relax for a while, refresh and then go."

Govindji was not willing to sit down. He said, "Sir, I am worried about a probable foul play being tried on us. Even though, they showed me the folded paper I could guess what it could be. Probably you too must be aware."....

Rama Kamati was surprised. Govindji was telling that Rama Kamati too must have been aware. What was he referring to, then? He looked at his sons who were looking as ignorant or innocent as he was.

Milk and eatables were brought but Govindji took only the milk. After drinking, he looked up again at Rama Kamati who now eagerly asked, "Govindji, tell me frankly about the foul play people intend to try on us. Let us not beat about the bush!"

"Sir," Govindji slowly replied: "Rumours are afloat in the market that the government is secretly collecting information about the persons who are in league with Kanhoji Angrey. For that purpose they have pr pared a list of all the important citizens of the city for their close surveillance.

"This is really a news by itself!" Babu showed his surprise.

"Even I am not aware!" Purusha added and Durga asked, "Father, are you not aware of this development?"

Rama Kamati became thoughtful for a while and silently shook his head to indicate he was not.

Govindji then concluded: "Sir, perhaps you are under the close scrutiny and surveillance of the government."

"What scrutiny?" Rama Kamati roared like a lion. He twisted the ends of his moustache and scornfully said, "In league with Kanhoji Angrey! Who would be in league with him when everyone in Bombay knows that he is not a friend of Bombay? Even personally, I look at the way in which he stopped and harassed the marriage party that was coming to us from Rajapur. I had to kneel down before the Governor and beg for his intervention."....

Govindji sought permission to take leave: "Sir, I thought it was my sacred duty to bring to your notice all that I have seen and heard. That is why I came over here running."

"It is very kind of you!" Babu praised: "I appreciate your faithfulness".

Govindji still looking pale joined his palms and took leave.

As soon as he left, Rama Kamati appreciated Govindji: "Really a trusted servant. Came running to report. During next Diwali, I must give him a substantial increase in his pay."....

Somehow Babu was upset after hearing the very name, Kanhoji Angrey. He at once said, "Father, instead of Govindji's salary let us think of those papers bearing your personal seal. Even by mistake or ignorance have you any time affixed your seal to any paper blank or written?"

Rama Kamati was stunned at the question put in by his son. He bowed his head down, pondered for a while and then said, "Son, why are you worried about the seal when I am innocent and loyal? Who in the City of Bombay can raise even a little finger to accuse me? I am really astounded at the way in which you people are worried about me!".....

"But, father," Babu respectfully said, "we have no doubt about your honesty, integrity and loyalty. But this Governor! People say that he is very rough and tough. He looks at everyone with suspicion and gets upset even at trivial matters. Father, it is not the money but the power that corrupts more. Let us be vigilant and careful."

For the first time, Rama Kamati could hear his eldest son speak to him so eloquently. He smiled: "Son, a person can challenge the whole world if he is honest and just."

Poor Rama Kamati!

Alas! At that moment of time it never occured to him that all that he had uttered and pronounced was only a catchy saying that could be printed in gold letters in a philosophical book but not capable of being translated into action in the present-day world full of jealousy and dishonesty. For, shortly afterwards on Twentysixth day of February 1720,

a charge-sheet in English with a translation in Portuguese was served on Rama Kamati alleging seven serious crimes by him! They were:

1. In the month of December 1717 when attempts were made by the Governor to get the release of the ship 'Success' belonging to Gordhan Das, broker of the Company, Rama Kamati secretly wrote to Kanhoji Angrey that the ship did not belong to the East India Company and so Kanhoji Angrey was not willing to deliver it without a substantial ransom.

2. In the month of October 1718 when there were hostilities between the English and Kanhoji Angrey Rama Kamati secretly wrote a letter to Kanhoji Angrey to make adequate preparations to guard the fortress and island of Khanderi as the English fleet was preparing for an invasion of Khanderi.

3. In the same month, he intercepted a letter written at the instance of Portuguese General of the North to the Governor of Bombay expressing the desire of the Portuguese to join hands with the English in their expedition against Kanhoji Angrey. Rama Kamati not only intercepted that letter but also secretly forwarded it to Kanhoji Angrey with his own letter giving further advice.

4. Rama Kamati had secretly suggested Kanhoji Angrey how he could invade Bombay and seize the Governor in person, giving a detailed plan.

5. Rama Kamati had carried on unlawful trade with the merchants in the enemy's territory even after the hostilities broke out and had sent with his grand son-in-law Gharu Shenoy's son, wool and potashes in exchange of rice and turmeric.

6. Even though in the month of November 1718 Rama Kamati was made the commander of the native forces, instead of encouraging them to fight the enemy, he secretly dissuaded them not to fight. When Antonio D'Costa, subedar of the company of sepoys brought to his notice that the chief officer of Panvel fort was willing to hand over the fort peacefully, he neglected the offer and did not bring it to the notice of the Governor.

7. On getting to know that the Government was going to

investigate his crimes, in the month of December 1719, he shipped off to Thana and other places all his wealth in fourteen chests.

The terrible charge-sheet specially made a mention that the Government was in possession of all the letters written and certificates made by Rama Kamati. It also said that they had living witnesses who could prove all the charges without difficulty.

The copy of the first letter purported to have been written by Rama Kamati was attached to the charge-sheet as an exhibit which read:

"To the opulent and magnificent as the sun, valorous and victorious, always courageous, the liberal, prudent and piller of fortitude, the essence of understanding, the protector of business, defender of faith, prosperous in all things, honored of kings, above all councillors, Senor Cannoji Angira Sarqueel. Ramajee Comatee, your servant, writes with all the veneration and readiness for your service and with your favor I remain as always.

Our General here has resolved in the Council to attack and take the fort of Cundry (Kenery), and thus it is agreed to environ the said Fort the 17th of October, and Armado, powder and ball, and all other necessesaries for war are ready. I therefore write Your Honor that you may have the said Fort well furnished. As for the side of the Rajaporee, I have spoken to and agreed with Allee Naiq Loucandee that they of Rajaporee shall not help either party, thus I have given this notice. I do not write more only beg that you'll retain me in your favor.

"Dated the 12th of October, 1718." (Sic)

Rama Kamati was at home when the charge-sheet was served upon him. A person of uncommon courage, coolness and intelligence, he patiently read the indictment. Unmoved by the contents he read and re-read. When he was about to read for the third time, in came his sons rushing: They saw their father on his usual seat without any streak of anxiety or fear on his face. As they went closer to him in small steps he looked up at them and silently held out the charge-sheet in English and its copy in Portuguese.

All of them read the charges. Their eyes became dull, face pale and they stood tongue-tied. Knowing not what to do next, with their

eyes wide open they stood in waiting expecting him to speak something.

Rama Kamati looked at them for a while and then slowly smiled, sadness writ large on his face. With his voice laden with pain he addressed, "Sons, Govindji was right. Government has played a trick on me. For the debacle of Khanderi expedition they wanted to make somebody a scapegoat and it appears they found it in me — a person loyal to the core. How could the government become blind when I have been serving the city and its people for more than four decades now?" For the first time tears appeared in the eyes of the aged patriot looking exactly like a lion but in a trap.

Sons went closer and tried to console him: "Father,please don't lose your heart. If you - a lion - instead or roaring,shed helpless tears who on the earth can protect us? Please stand up and challenge all these allegations. Let us test whether or not there is a ray of honesty in the enveloping darkness of dishonesty."

"Sons," Rama Kamati wiped his tears and said, "who will care for the trapped lion even if it thundered? Just look at the concluding part of the charge-sheet. The government says they have the letters written by me and they have the witnesses too." His voice broke and with great difficulty he concluded,...."to prove my guilt."

"Yes-witnesses and letters!" Babu said scornfully,"If you have money, nothing is impossible. They say except father and mother everything else can be sold and purchased in Bombay."

Durga then reminded: "Father, they want you to submit your written statement in defence before the Seventeenth day of March,1720."

"What written statement?" He said in disgust, "When the government itself is both the prosecutor and the judge where is the scope for a better deal? Let me meet my fate peacefully!"

"Father, why are you so dejected?" Babu said,"We shall fight for justice. When we know we are innocent why should we be afraid?"

"Son," Rama Kamati said, "things are not as easy as we presume. Tell me where is the scope for an appeal if the judges decide that I am guilty?"

"But, father..." Babu wanted to tell something but inbetween at

the door appeared a contingent of armed guards. Their chief loudly enquired, "Mr. Rama Kamati..."

"Yes I am!" He went to the door boldly.

"Sorry, Mr. Kamati," the chief said, "you are under house arrest.From now onwards you cannot move out except for appearing in the trial." He served an order on Rama Kamati prohibiting his movement outside. "Permit me to visit at least Mumbadevi temple and Venkatramana temple." He pleaded but the grim-faced chief declined to grant the permission.

By evening some more orders were served on him not to send out any moveables belonging to him. The government officials visited his residence prepared an inventory of moveable assets and more precious things like gold ornaments and silver wares were packed and sealed and taken possession of. Then a receiver was appointed to take charge of tobacco farms. The Vereadores of Bombay and Mahim were instructed to take charge of his orchards and gardens besides the ones leased out by the government. Since Rama Kamati was the head of the family everything was confiscated and all of a sudden the family was thrown into poverty and misery.

In the late evening, Rama Kamati came to know that his loyal secretary Govindji also was arrested and put in the jail known as "Trunk" in that part of Bombay. And Dulba Bhandary, his trusted friend was also put under house arrest alleging that he was an accomplice of Rama Kamati!

By a mere stroke of the pen, Rama Kamati a great son of Bombay became a condemned man.

In all parts of Bombay news of Rama Kamati's house arrest spread like a wild forest fire burning everything on the way. People refused to accept the allegations made against the loyal son of Bombay and they felt that it was nothing short of an atrocity and a conspiracy to snatch his enormous wealth resorting to blackmail and mental torture. If the government would stoop so low, how could people live in Bombay with a sense of security? How? Thus a big and puzzling question mark stood before the right thinking people of Bombay, without an immediate answer in sight.

27. TRIAL WITHOUT A PARALLEL

With his hands clean, conscience clear and heart strong and stout, Rama Kamati was neither frightened nor moved an inch on going through the grave charges levelled against him. But the other members of his family were totally nervous being unable to get any clue or help to get out of the danger.

Rama Kamati had to face the terrible trial and then prove his innocence though he was innocent to the core. Except perhaps the men in the authority, everyone in Bombay was aware of his innocence but a the trial meant a trial requiring him to produce proofs and witnesses if at all he had to win his legal battle and get back his assets. He was a judge and so he knew how difficult it would be to win even a strong case in the absence of a proper witness or a suitable proof. Firmly relying on his sincere and loyal service to the government both at the time of war and peace he thought of defending the case himself with his prudence and common sense. Therefore, he took his pen and decided to prepare his statement in defence giving his version denying all the charges levelled against him. Before writing down he offered prayers to his family deity and also to Mumbadevi -his guardian deity at the time of difficulties to give him courage and boldness and then started writing elaborately: He first mentioned about his loyal and sincere service to the government. In the light of his meritorious service spanning over four decades he said, he expected a better treatment. Then he stated emphatically that if at all there were any persons who had come forward to stand as witnesses against him, they were induced to do so with bribes, promises or threats of punishment and not otherwise as he was throughout guiltless and innocent. He then proceeded to give reply to the specific charges as below:

1. There was no need for him to give to Kanhoji Angrey the information about the ownership of the ship 'Success' as, as soon as a ship was captured, Kanhoji Angrey's men would collect this information from the captain and the crew. More than that Kanhoji Angrey himself had the fullest information of all the ships in Surat and there was no need for him to get it from any source.

2. The fortress of Khanderi at the time of attack was so ill-equipped that the people on guard there had to wait for a regular supply of arms and ammunition to resume the attack. Now it was a well-known fact that even the women in the island had to join their men to defend the fortress in the absence of sufficient number of warriors. Then it was Rama Kamati that had first brought to the notice of the Governor how poorly the fortress was guarded. If at all he had written a secret letter to Kanhoji Angrey advising him to take proper care why should the fortress remain in that vulnerable condition?

3. He neither received any letter from the Portuguese Governor nor did he have any knowledge of it. On the contrary he doubted whether there was any such letter that was ever sent by the Portuguese Governor.

4. It was the foolishness on the part of Rama Kamati to imagine even for a moment about the invasion of Bombay by any outsiders when Bombay had a strong fort, formidable navy and loyal officers.

5. His grand-son-in-law came to Bombay for the marriage with the express permission of the Governor. On the way back he had carried home the merchandise publicly purchased in Bombay. Therefore there were no secret deals at all.

6. It was a fact that he was the commander of native forces but at the same time the contingent of Pathans was not under his command. Then the proposal of the chief officer of Panvel to hand over the fort was not at all conveyed to him as Mr Antonio D'Costa never worked under him but was serving for Major Stanton and so there was no need for him to communicate to him.

7. It was utterly false that he had sent out of Bombay the wealth in fourteen chests in anticipation of some punishment as he was least suspecting any such punishment since his hands were always clean.

At the end he asserted that all the three letters purported to have been written were not written by him at all since they did not bear his signature nor the handwriting was his Those who could illicitly write his name could also prepare fake seals and affix without any difficulty. He finally took the liberty to reiterate that just as the letters and seals were fake ones the witnesses also could have been borrowed and brought over ones by bribes, fair promises and the threats of punishment by his

accusers. He therefore would appeal to the Governor and the Council to go by his track record in the past and clear him of all the charges.

After preparing the rejoinder Rama Kamati showed it to his sons. They appreciated the honesty ringing throughout the defence statement but felt that the government might not take kindly his remarks about the witnesses being bribed and bought.

But Rama Kamati was firm.

"I shall live for the truth and die for upholding the truth. Let this statement go as it is and remain as a part of the official records even if I am going to be hanged!" He roared like a lion.

Yes - his sons were right. The Governor and the Council did not take his reply kindly especially his mention about the witnesses even though they were bought in exactly the same way as visualised by Rama Kamati. The tribunal promptly repudiated all his allegations about the witnesses. Then came the time for hearing.

Rama Kamati in chains was produced before the tribunal and everyone who personally knew him felt that it was the darkest day in the history of Bombay. But Rama Kamati - what a great person he was! He maintained cool throughout the trial.

Surprisingly the main witness was none other than Govindji, Rama Kamati's trusted secretary and when he was asked to appear, Rama Kamati strongly objected.

All the members of the tribunal were taken aback at his objection and Lawrence Parker, the Chief Justice of Bombay who happened to be a member of the Council and now a member of the Tribunal collectively deciding the case, asked, "Why there should be the objection?"

Rama Kamati instantly shouted at the pitch of his voice: "Your Honours may please enquire why the witness is covering both of his hands."

"Why?" Everyone in the Council asked rather astounded. They asked him to show his hands. Govindji slowly removed the shawl and showed both his palms. There were bandages around both of his thumbs!

"What are they?" Some one at once shouted and there was noise

everywhere.

As the situation appeared to go out of control, the Governor who was acting as the President of the Tribunal stood up and said, "Quiet please! Let me clarify: In the 'trunk' Govindji used to write some notes and send them outside through his sons who would bring him food. The notes simply read, "They are putting pressure on me to disclose but I am not doing it." When asked for whom these notes were meant he declined and so I sanctioned fixing iron nails to his thumbs. After fixing the nails, out of pain, he had confessed everything. He said all the three letters were written by him to Kanhoji Angrey at the instance of Rama Kamati and he himself had affixed Rama Kamati's personal seal with his full knowldge. In the 'trunk' he had begged for pen and paper and we readily provided just to test him and the whole truth came out because of applying nails to the thumbs!"

On hearing this, everyone in the hall was stunned. There was a pin-drop silence except the tick-tock sound of the large pedestalled clock kept in a corner looking as if it was also gaping at the startling disclosure made by the Governor who headed the Tribunal to decide the fate of an innocent man who had dedicated the whole of his life in selfless service to the people of Bombay.

Moment after moment ticked by and breaking the silence, the Chief Justice eloquently stated, "Your Excellency, the method of applying screws to the thumbs of a person to extract witness was long ago abolished in our country and this ought not to have been done here without the express consent of the Tribunal, that too when the witness is a servant of the accused. I am sorry therefore that I will not be able to sit on the Tribunal with a safe conscience. Please excuse me." Lawrence Parker declaring like this in the open court staged a walkout much to the displeasure of the President who, instantly adjourned the proceedings for the day and left the hall agitated over the behaviour of the Chief Justice.

During the next sitting of the trial, the Chief Justice abstained from the proceedings on health grounds. Thereafter he deliberately remained absent. Informing that Rama Kamati's trial was the most important one concerning the interests of the East India Company in

India, the President sent words requiring him to be present but the Chief Justice sticking to his stand sent back a message that when the witness was obtained by means of torture, he would not sit as a member of the Tribunal and do justice to the job. Without him the trial continued bringing in a lot of excitement and sensation not only in Bombay but also in other parts of Western India.

At one point of time the Governor assured that the Tribunal would proceed with tender care but everyone could draw a conclusion that Rama Kamati would not be able to come out of the trap when Govindji had already confessed that all the letters were written by him at the instance of Rama Kamati in the presence of his friend, Dulba Bhandary. Even though Rama Kamati pleaded that when he was literate enough to read and write how could he ever ask another person to write such important letters of confidential nature. He also wondered how could the Tribunal take cognizance of the letters when they bore neither his signature nor his handwriting.

When there was none to listen to his pleas, Rama Kamati was convinced that the entire process of trial was nothing but a high drama being enacted with the sole objective of bringing about his ruination and downfall.

Therefore he decided to remain calm and take everything in his stride. Witness after witness was produced to prove his guilt. Even a dancer from a troupe that moved from place to place to give public performances was produced to affirm that Kanhoji Angrey had disclosed to her that Rama Kamati had written to him about the ownership of the controversial ship, 'Success!'

And after examining all the witnesses on the Eleventh day of April, 1720 judges in the Tribunal were to deliver their verdict. It took sometime for them to debate and decide. Then they unanimously decided that he was guilty of high crimes and misdemeanors though he was not guilty of treason. Therefore they ordered that as punishment he should be confined to prison for life and his estate, be forfeited to the East India Company.

Throughout the period of trial Rama Kamati had conducted himself with a commendable dignity and self-confidence.

Even though he was fully innocent when the verdict was pronounced Rama Kamati spoke not a word of protest, feared not for the worst ever punishment and asked not for any leniency in the sentence.

When the Tribunal rose for the day feeling elated that they had accomplished a great feat, Rama Kamati with all seriousness conceded that whatever be the decree of the fate he would ungrudgingly accept!

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28. THE UNSEATED CHIEF JUSTICE

It took more than three months for the members of the family to obtain permission to meet Rama Kamati in the prison.

Those were the days when the prison was called the 'trunk' a corruption of the Portuguese word 'trunco' which in fact was like a cage for keeping wild beasts with a door of iron bars in the front and walls on the other sides.

The sons could not bear the sight of their father behind the bars. Within a period of three months his majestic appearance had totally disappeared and the face that was always looking gracious and innocent, had become dull and pale with a shadow of frustration, disappointment and disgust. His eyes losing all their lustre had gone deep into the sockets and the body that was always erect had started bending. Now at seventy he should have spent his days peacefully that too after leading a busy life in the service of Bombay and her inhabitants. Did he roar, fight and live fearlessly like a lion only to spend the evening of his life in a cage called 'trunk?' Then where was the thing called justice? Did it disappear from the face of this earth once for all?

Thinking like this with hapless tears in their eyes his sons went close to the door of the dungeon.

Rama Kamati tried to smile at his sons but the lips did not move. Instead his eyes wanted to convey something in the form of tears. However when the tears came he promptly wiped and asked his sons to come closer.

They went close and as they wanted to touch him stretching their arms he asked in a whisper: "How are you, my sons?"

"Father," Babu, the eldest son, with tears in eyes said, "What can we say? As soon as you were imprisoned the officials from the Castle came and evicted us out of the house. They confiscated everything available. Our ladies were allowed to carry only things they had on their person and everything else including the saris and ornaments were confiscated. Our house inside the Fort was then sold for Rs. 20,000/- coconut gardens and paddy fields in other places for Rs. 38,000/- and the large warehouse of 86 feet length and equal breadth in the Bazar was taken possession valuing barely at Rs. 6,000/-! Then through the tom-tom thay made an announcement in the city that anybody who has a monetary claim against you must submit within ten days to the Court of Judicature. Interestingly none had claimed except the Governor. He had put forth a demand for Rs. 12792/- on behalf of the East India Company."

Being unable to continue further with tears flooding the eyes at the loss of everything and also at the memory of the atrocities committed on the family he stopped the narration and in a broken voice requested his younger brother, Durga to continue.

Durga told, "Father, as if with a vengeance, they have decided to shift the Court of Judicature to the first floor of our godown."

Hearing Rama Kamati suddenly burst into laughter.

"My godown to become the Court? Good! Let the people of Bombay remember that as a rigorous punishment to an innocent man, my property was confiscated to convert into a court to give justice. I only pray that at least from my premises impartial justice will be awarded to all the people of Bombay at all times!"

"Father," Babu wiping his tears said in a whisper: " Do you know, Lawrence Parker who held the position of the Deputy Governor, Chief Accountant and the Chief Justice and who had boycotted your trial?"

"Yes, I know!" said Rama Kamati: "That noble English gentleman who had boldly said that when the witness was illegally tortured he could not sit with a safe conscience to decide the case. Tell

me what has happened to him."

"He is suspended and unseated from all the positions." Babu revealed, "Now he lives like an ordinary citizen. People say he had earned the displeasure of the Governor on account of his deliberately not participating in the trial against you."

Rama Kamati was astounded to hear: "I can't imagine. I thought that all Englishmen are alike."

"Father," Babu said, again in a whisper: " He has sent words to me advising that you should make an appeal to the Governor to have a second look at the entire trial and if required to order for a re-trial."

"Is it possible, my son?" Rama Kamati asked haplessly: "I doubt very much about the effectiveness of my appeal. The Governor has taken everything personally."

"But father!" Babu had this to say: "You know almost exactly after a month of your trial, Dulba uncle's trial took place. He was convicted as your accomplice. As a punishment he was ordered to pay a fine of Rs. 6,000/- and also the repayment of his former debt of Rs.1,494/- to the East India Company. He was asked to pay this sum within three months and till then he was to be confined in the prison. He was sent to Mahim Fort and we learn that he is still in the prison being unable to bring in the requisite amount. But father, now the things are favourable to us to prefer an appeal."

"Why?" Rama Kamati eagerly asked.

Durga answered: "Father, when we were engrossed in your trial and Dulba uncle's we had very little time to look at the outside world. People at large hold you in high esteem and when the trial was taking place, they were silently watching the proceedings knowing fully well that it was nothing but a mock trial to bring about our ruination. The so-called punishment awarded to you was resented by all. When you deserved to be honoured publicly for meritorious service to the city, condemning you to the prison came as a rude shock. Dulba uncle's trial added insult to injury. It found expression in people's boycotting government offices and defying orders. Ultimately they grew restless. They took out processions in protest of the illegal trials, went up to the

Castle and shouted slogans against the government. Then the government immediately issued orders asking people to maintain peace and law and order assuring that except Rama Kamati and Dulba Bhandary all others are pardoned and there will not be any more trials and punishment in this behalf!"

Hearing with rapt attention Rama Kamati sighed deeply and then smiled cheerfully: "Sons, I am happy and proud of my brothers and sisters of Bombay, who have shown their love and respect to me by organising protest rallies. I feel, I am honoured today and from this moment, all my agony and mental torture is gone."

"Father," Durga revealed: "The Portuguese General has now written to our Governor that he had never written any letter offering help to the English. Do you remember that it was one of the serious charges against you that you had intercepted a letter from the Portuguese General of the North and sent it to Kanhoji Angrey? The letter produced as a proof of your alleged crime was merely a forgery by one of the Portuguese officials. The General has informed that the official, Captain Antonio Felloes, who had got fake seals prepared in Bombay by a gold-smith confessed and accepted his guilt of writing a forged letter. But our Governor did not take the letter kindly and thinking that they are trying to help you out he had proclaimed that all the Portuguese bishops and priests must quit Bombay at once. Then we also learn that he had shot back that there were other crimes, greater ones commited by Rama Kamati, that deserve more stringent punishment than the present one."

"What punishment is more stringent than life-imprisonment?" Rama Kamati scornfully said: "I am suffering from the pangs of disgrace and mental torture and you people for no fault of yours from poverty and hunger, being thrown out of the hearth and the home. Well, the Governor and Council could have thought of hanging me to death instead of this slow poisoning." Again tears appeared in his eyes.

"Father, please don't lose your heart!" The sons requested: "Here is your appeal to the Governor for a re-trial. It is in triplicate. Please sign on all the three sheets." They offered the pen and the sheets of paper on which the appeal was written.

Wiping away his tears, Rama Kamati took the pen and paper inserted inside the dungeon. He signed all the three sheets and while giving back he asked: "Do you really believe that the Governor will accept this?"

"Father," Babu told: "There is nothing wrong in trying. But we have a solid assurance of help. That is from the former Chief Justice Mr Lawrence Parker. He has sent words that so long as there is breath in his body he will fight out the injustice as well as the ruination brought upon our family. Let us rely on him."

Rama Kamati feebly smiled.

The sons left the jail finishing the first visit with feelings full of sorrow and hope.

The Governor however promptly rejected the appeal. And then Govindji made an appeal stating that his witness was obtained by illegal means. But that also met with the same fate.

As the matter stood, Lawrence Parker had to leave Bombay and take shelter in the Portuguese territory to avoid further confrontation with the Governor, Charles Boone. Lawrence Parker had a friend and collegue called John Braddyll in the Council of Bombay who was unseated from the Council in 1721 on the allegation that he wanted to dethrone the Governor and assume the charge of Governorship of Bombay. He too fled to the Portuguese territory to save himself from the wrath of the Governor.

In the month of January 1722, Governor Boone was asked to hand over the charge to his successor Mr Phipps and return to England. He was called back by the bo ,ses of the East India Company being unhappy over the way in which he was handling the things in Bombay. After his departure, the Company reinstated both Lawrence Parker and John Braddyll but only Braddyll took up the assignment again. Lawrence Parker true to his promise was carrying with him all along the copy of the appeal by Rama Kamati and also by Govindji and indeed it took a very long time to get the redressal and justice for Rama Kamati.

In 1743, in England along with John Braddyll he paid a visit to the Company's headquarters and took up the case himself. After

examining everything the Court of Directors acquitted Rama Kamati of all the guilt and ordered the Government of Bombay to pay a sum of Rs. 4,000/- as a difference in valuation, passing the following orders:

"We had this year presented to us by means of Mr Lawrence Parker and Mr William Henry Draper Authentick Copys of the Memorials of the late unhappy Rama Comattee and Govindjee his Secretary.

We took the same into consideration and we send you herewith our Unanimous Opinion thereupon, grounded on the evidence of the aforesaid Gentlemen and Mr. John Braddyll who voluntarily appeared before us, together with the opinions of Governor Phipps and Mr Courtney.

And being further informed that the said Rama Comattee might suffer in the valuation of that part of his Estate which was confiscated for the payment of his Debt to Us, which undervaluation might amount to Four thousand Ruppees We do hereby order that sum to be paid to his Heirs.

As we can at this Distance of time get no legal Proof concerning any other parts of his Estate, and as we would prevent vexatious Suits that may be carried on out of Revenge We can only recommend it to you to give us an Account of any Information you may receive of that kind, and how it came to the present Possessors, that we may give out Judgment and Orders thereupon.

But if any of those who Counterfeited the Seal, or those who were partys to that Forgery can be Discovered, thay ought to be prosecuted with the utmost Rigour as unworthy of living under our protection, of which Forgery and the Means used to effect it, Mr. Braddyll assures us you may get a perfect Information from the Portugueze." (sic)

Unfortunately around the year 1725 in the 'trunk' itself Rama Kamati died and his eldest son Babu and the youngest son Purusha did not live beyond 1727. Durga Kamati was the only survivor to hear the order of acquittal and receive Rs 4,000/- besides a family pension of Rs. 30/- per month sanctioned in 1728 perhaps as a reparation by the government, that, by then was convinced of the forgeries perpetrated on

the innocent and noble soul and that the government was used as a tool by the people who were jealous of a loyal citizen of Bombay and his great accomplishments.

But the remarkable part of the order of acquittal was a strong advice to the Government of Bombay to bring the culprits to books.

But could they do it?

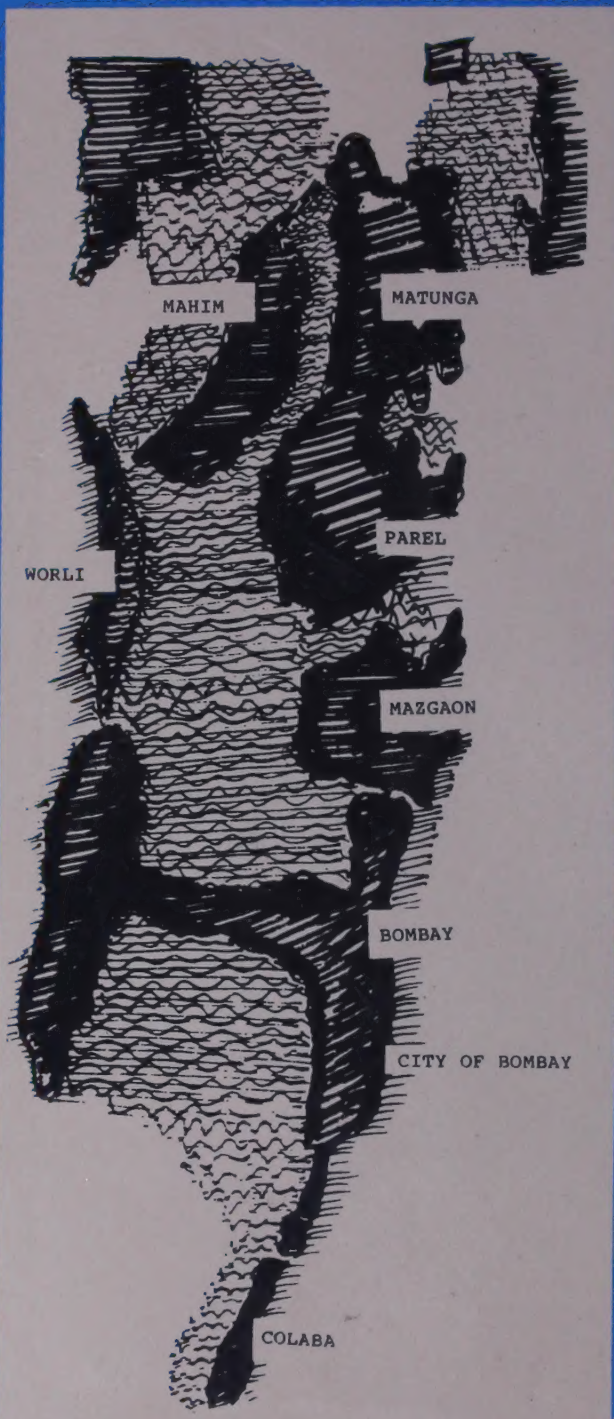
Well, from the beginning itself Bombay was a city always looking forward. Without having a minute to spare to look back, every inhabitant was too busy to mind anything beyond his own business and so the whole episode of the trial of Rama Kamati must have been forgotten when the acquittal came.

The culprits were apparently rewarded soon after the trial. No attempts were made to bring them to books even when it came to light that everything was fake and that Rama Kamati was absolutely innocent.

And the innocent Rama Kamati!

Like a condemned prisoner he died in the trunk unwept and unsung. His tragic end remained unnoticed in the city that he had cared and loved so much during his life time, and except the surviving members of his family who were in abject poverty struggling hard for survival, nobody else mourned his death. Even after his acquittal nobody thought of singing his glories or erecting a monument to commemorate the memory of a great but unfortunate son of Bombay.

Really it was an anti-climax and perhaps Rama Kamati was destined to have it inspite of his unquestionable loyalty and integrity. Otherwise how the judges could ever rely strongly on the letters that bore neither his signatures nor his handwriting to award the punishment? In the annals of the judicial history there is no parallel to this trial and this alone must have immortalised Rama Kamati and his noble deeds.



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